Tamil TIMES

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-Voltaire

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Unconditional talks, but ....!

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are prepared for "unconditional" peace talks with the Government. The LTTE leader said so in his recent annual "Heroes Day" speech. The Government of Sri Lanka is also prepared for "unconditional immediate" peace talks with the LTTE. A statement released from the Presidential Secretariat on 12 December said so. Both parties have agreed to Norwegian facilitation. If that is the position of both parties, why don't they fix a date and venue and get on with the peace talks aimed at bringing an end to the conflict in Sri Lanka?

Let us be frank and blunt. Both parties are not telling the truth when they say that they are prepared for "unconditional" peace talks. Accompanying their announcements professing their readiness for "unconditional" peace talks are a plethora of pre-conditions they are putting forward.

The LTTE leader has said that he is "prepared for unconditional peace talks with the Sri Lanka government but insisted on a process of de-escalation of war and the creation of a conducive climate of goodwill and normalcy in the Tamil homeland to facilitate the talks", and "explained that by normalcy he meant the restoration of normal civilian life by removing the economic blockade and other restrictions imposed on the Tamil people." He also proposed "a process of de-escalation of war leading to cessation of armed hostilities and the creation of a peaceful, cordial environment." And he further said that "our call for de-escalation and normalisation of civilian life should not be misinterpreted as pre-conditions. We want the talks to proceed from a stable foundation in a cordial atmosphere of mutual trust so that it could turn out to be a constructive engagement".

On the other hand the government's statement released by the Presidential Secretariat said, "Both, the government and the President are particularly keen that no time should be lost in addressing the main core issues, that no time should be lost on peripheral and fringe matters, ...In the government's view the crucial political issues that affect the future of Sri Lanka should not be evaded any longer. The government states that political talks with the LTTE, aimed at resolving the conflict, can and should begin forthwith. This requires that the LTTE agree that the core issues should comprise the agenda of negotiations. The core issues, as the government has consistently maintained, are:- the stoppage of war, the stoppage of all terrorist killings, the resolution of the Tamil people's problems through negotiated political settlement and a speedy resolution of the problems of those displaced by war, etc. .....Finally, the government wishes to state that the time has come to move beyond rhetoric to the discussion of concrete political issues, within a definite time frame with a clear political outcome in view."

That the respective positions of the LTTE and the Government contain a number of "pre-conditions" is self-evident. However, what needs to be underlined as significant is that both parties have expressed their willingness to talk. In this context, now that we have an outside "facilitator", let him talk to the parties with a view to drawing up an agenda for talks to begin. It may be that the first round of talks will be limited to just to drawing up an agenda for future talks. If the LTTE wants to discuss about other matters which are of concern to them before they will enter into substantive talks on the political issues for a negotiated settlement, they should be able to do so. If the Government wants to discuss the merit of their view that talks on the substantive political issues should commence before discussion on what they describe as "peripheral issues", it should also be able to do so. The beneficial result of this approach is that the parties would have begun to talk to each other across the table, and that alone can be considered an achievement.

Once the parties have sit down to talk, it may be that the facilitator can persuade the parties to agree an agenda which enables the discussion of both subjects - namely matters relating to the restoration of conditions of normalcy leading to a cessation of hostilities, and talks on substantive political issues - at the same time. It could be that two separate teams from either side discussing both subjects at the same time, or a team from either side discussing the two subjects in two separate sessions, say one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. There may be other or better ways to enable simultaneous discussion of both subjects.

If the parties are genuinely committed to the goal of a negotiated political settlement, then they should move away from their current fixed positions and start talking to each other with the assistance of the facilitator. The people must be spared of the current spate of rhetoric and posturing. They deserve better.

PIRAPAHARAN'S HEROES DAY SPEECH

"Ready for Peace Talks in a Cordial Atmosphere and Conditions of Normalcy"

(Text of the press release by the International Secretariat of LTTE, 211 Katherine Rd, London E6 1BU, United Kingdom)

The leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) Mr. Velupillai Pirapaharan declared today (27 November 2000) that his organisation is prepared for unconditional peace talks with the Sri Lanka government but insisted on a process of de-escalation of war and the creation of a conducive climate of goodwill and normalcy in the Tamil homeland to facilitate the talks.

Enunciating the organisation's policy in his annual Heroes' Day speech the Tamil Tiger leader explained that by normalcy he meant the restoration of normal civilian life by removing the economic blockade and other restrictions imposed on the Tamil people.

Mr. Pirapaharan revealed that the Government of Norway has suggested positive proposals as confidence building goodwill measures to be mutually reciprocated by the parties in conflict that would facilitate the process of de-escalation leading to cessation of hostilities. He admitted that the LTTE is seriously considering the proposals. "If the government takes the initiative we will respond positively", the LTTE leader said.

"Our liberation organisation is prepared to participate in negotiations to find a political solution to the ethnic conflict through peaceful means. We are not opposed to peaceful processes of resolving conflicts. Nor are we reluctant to engage in peaceful dialogue. We are seeking a negotiated settlement that would be fair, just, and equitable and that it would satisfy the political aspirations of the Tamil people. I explained this position very clearly when I met the Norwegian peace delegates in Wanni recently. We are not imposing any pre-conditions for peace talks. Yet we insist on the creation of a cordial atmosphere and conditions of normalcy conducive for peace negotiations. It is practically difficult for both the parties who have been involved in a savage and bloody war for the last two decades with mutual animosity and distrust to suddenly enter into a peace process, while continuing hostilities. It is precisely for this reason we propose a process of de-escalation of war leading to cessation of armed hostilities and the creation of a peaceful, cordial environment", Mr. Pirapaharan said.

The LTTE leader further explained that "our call for de-escalation and normalisation of civilian life should not be misinterpreted as pre-conditions. We want the talks to proceed from a stable foundation in a cordial atmosphere of mutual trust so that it could turn out to be a constructive engagement".

"Chandrika's term of office is to continue for the next six years. Whether it is going to be a turbulent period characterised by war and violence or whether peace will prevail during this period depends entirely on the policies to be adopted by Chandrika. This Government has assumed power with the support of the chauvinistic forces. It has achieved victory by indulging in wide-scale violence and massive electoral malpractices. Those who hold important positions in the power structure of this Government are hard-line ultranationalists. A treacherous Tamil group who made a mockery of democracy by its electoral violence and fraudulence is also supporting this Government. We have our doubts as to whether this Government, which pathetically depends on Sinhala racists and Tamil traitors for its sustenance, will be able to make any bold decisions to resolve the Tamil national question", the LTTE leader said.

Mr. Pirapaharan also criticised Kumaratunga government for its confused and incoherent policy towards resolving the ethnic conflict. "This Government does not have any coherent policy or a determined approach towards the issues of war and peace and towards the resolution of the ethnic conflict. It constantly makes contradictory statements. Since this government is constituted by different personalities with different views we hear different voices which are confusing. We hear different voices from the President, the Prime Minister and the Army commander; one calling for peace talks with the Tamil Tigers, the other vowing to destroy them and yet another calling for surrender. This government has several tongues each addressing a different audience. Chandrika and Kadirgamar present an amicable picture to the international community while the Prime Minister and Army Commander placate the local chauvinistic forces", the Tiger leader observed.

The following are extracts from Mr. Pirapaharan's statement:

"The Western Governments want peace and a negotiated settlement through peaceful means. They insist that the Tamil conflict cannot be resolved by war. It is precisely for this reason that Chandrika has been making subtle propaganda statements to placate the western nations using the categories of peace, negotiations, devolution and constitutional reforms.

As far as the LTTE and the Tamil people are concerned we do not believe that Chandrika is sincerely committed to peace. We view her as a hard-liner committed to a military solution. The LTTE and the Tamil people are compelled to take this position because of Chandrika's political history for over the last six years and her policy of subjecting our people to military atrocities and economic injustices and her recent measures mobilising the country for war. The colossal sums allocated for military

spending, the procurement of massive scale military hardware, the continuous recruitment for the armed forces and the witch-hunting of the army deserters clearly demonstrate the fact that Chandrika is a militaristic hard-liner committed to strengthening the military machine for war.

Chandrika's inconsistency and confused approach to the Tamil ethnic conflict can be best discerned if one analyses her policy statement on the 9th of this month at the opening of the first session of Parliament. Tracing the history of the ethnic conflict, Chandrika agrees that injustice has been done to the Tamils for the last 50 years. Without making direct reference to the Tamils she used the general category 'minority communities'. To quote her in this context: "The real cause of the ethnic crisis is the minority communities have not had a fair or reasonable opportunity to share in the political, social and economic power structure of this country". The strange aspect of this exposition is that Chandrika fails to answer the questions as to why, how and who did this injustice to the Tamils. She shifts the entire blame onto foreign colonialism for all injustices done to the Tamil people. Chandrika's thesis is that existing Sri Lankan state system emanated from essentially colonial power structure "that does not suit in anyway the prevailing conditions in our society" and therefore failed to provide justice and fair play to the 'minority communities'. In this elucidation the cruel history of Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinistic oppression against the Tamil people is skilfully suppressed. The role of Chandrika's parents in this history of oppression is also covered up. This attempt to link the racist oppression against the Tamils to constitutional systems and shift the entire blame to foreign colonialism is incredible and preposterous.

It is a historical fact that the Tamils lost their sovereignty over their homeland as a consequence of foreign colonial penetration. But a calculated systematic oppression against the Tamil nation began soon after the island of Sri Lanka gained independence from British colonialism. Sinhala-Buddhist racism was the main perpetrator of this oppression. The Sinhala-Buddhist racist ideology, with its roots buried in Sri Lankan Buddhism, has perversely spread throughout the Sinhala social formation and penetrated deep into the Sinhala political system. The constitutions that were made by Sinhala politicians are nothing but institutional forms of this ideology. Therefore, the culprit behind the tyrannical oppression of the Tamils is Sinhala Buddhist racism not the British colonial thought system as Chandrika assumes.

The political struggles launched by the Tamils against the Sinhala racist oppression in the early stages took the form of non-violent agitation which later transformed into an armed resistance campaign and finally assumed the dimension of an all-out war. For more than twenty years a state of war has existed between the Tamil Tigers, the liberation army of the Tamils and the Sinhala State. As a nation entitled to the right to self-determination our people reserve the right to defend themselves by armed struggle against State oppression of genocidal proportions. Therefore, Tamil Eelam war is conducted within the norms of International Humanitarian Law pertaining to armed conflict. But the Sri Lanka government has been deliberately distorting the nature of this war and its evolutionary historical background and debasing it as a phenomenon of 'terrorism'. Commenting on the armed conflict in her recent policy statement Chandrika described the war as a 'consequence of the ethnic conflict'. In the same statement she also categorises the war as a form of 'armed terrorism'. It is the same tongue that defines the war as a manifestation of ethnic conflict and also as 'armed terrorism'. It is the same Chandrika who proclaims that ethnic conflict will be resolved by peaceful means and also calls upon the Sinhala people to unite to annihilate terrorism by war. It is in the realm of war that Chandrika government makes the most confusing statements distorting the reality of the Tamil armed struggle against State oppression as a form of 'terrorism' thereby totally misrepresenting the ethnic conflict to the Sinhala people and the world.

Tamil Eelam war is the liberation struggle of the oppressed Tamil people. The Sinhala ruling elites are refusing to accept this stark political reality. This denial of truth, this refusal to face reality is the stumbling block to finding a political resolution to the conflict through peaceful means.

Political negotiations are not unfamiliar to the Tamil people. Our liberation movement as well as the Tamil leadership before us had negotiations with the Sinhalese on several occasions. From the time of the Banda-Chelva Pact there has been peace talks over the last several decades under different historical conjunctures, under different compulsions. But all these talks have failed to resolve the Tamil problem. Instead the conflict has become more complex and finally transformed into an all-out war. The main reason for this unfortunate situation is the refusal of the Sinhala nation to recognise the fundamentals of the Tamil conflict as well as the political aspirations of the Tamils. If a permanent political solution is to be achieved by peaceful means, the Sinhala nation has to accept certain basic truths about the Tamil people and understand their basic aspirations.

The Tamils of Eelam have a unique ethnic identity. They are a community of people constituted as a national formation experiencing a national consciousness of their own. They have their own lands; a historically constituted territory which is their homeland. Our people desire only one thing. They want to live happily in peace in their own lands without being dominated or harassed by others. The deepest aspiration of our people is to live in dignity in a political environment where they could rule themselves. The Sinhalese should try to understand the Tamil aspirations. It is on the basis of this understanding a just and permanent solution could be built up.

We have our doubts as to whether Chandrika's government will do justice to the Tamils on the basis of understanding the fundamentals of the Tamil question. The outbreak of racist barbarism against the Tamils in the south, the hegemonic role of the chauvinistic elements in the power struc-

ture of the State, the continuous militarisation of the Sinhala society, the anti-Tamil attitude of the Maha Sangha, the Government's commitment to the military option; all these factors cast doubt as to whether the Tamil national question could be resolved by peaceful means. Furthermore, certain irrational measures adopted by Chandrika's government also make the resolution of the Tamil question difficult. In a similar manner the earlier Indian government made a historical blunder by crowning Perumal as Chief Minister, Chandrika has also elevated a Tamil quisling group to a high position in the Northeastern administration. By such ridiculous actions this government has not only earned the hostility of the Tamil people but also complicated the ethnic conflict.

The international community is becoming more concerned about the Tamil national conflict and wants the problem to be solved by peaceful means. It is encouraging to note that the conscience of the world has turned towards our plight. We are impressing upon the world that we are not an anyway opposed to peace talks or a negotiated political settlement through peaceful means. The world community has begun to understand the fundamental demands of the Tamils and our position that a cordial environment conducive for peace talks is a pre-requisite. They also understand the forces behind the oppression of the Tamils. It is because of the massive financial aid obtained from donor countries that Sri Lanka can continue this war against the Tamils. Having unleashed a destructive war against the Tamils and having slaughtered a large number of our people, this government has been misleading the international community by claiming that it is engaged in a 'war for peace'. But the world has now begun to realise the ulterior motives behind the war and the Tamil Tigers cannot be vanquished in armed combat and that the Tamil ethnic conflict cannot be resolved by war. Therefore, if Sri Lanka is to be directed towards the path of peace, the reins are in the hands of the international governments who feed the economic needs of the country. We do not believe that Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism, which is growing fast and proliferating at all levels of the Sinhala social structure, will embrace the Tamil people with compassion. If the Sinhala nation fails to redeem itself from the grip of racism and continues its repression against the Tamils, we have no alternative other than to secede and form an independent Tamil State".

Commenting on the ground situation the LTTE leader admitted that he was compelled to delay his advance into Jaffna as a consequence of unilateral intervention by international governments who injected massive military assistance to the Sri Lankan military forces at a crucial time in the battle of Jaffna. "The entire world rushed to help Sri Lanka with emergency military assistance when Chandrika raised the alarm of an impending military disaster claiming that the lives of thirty thousand troops were in danger", Mr. Pirapaharan said. "It was the same

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Ready for Immediate Talks, Says Government

The Sri Lankan government has said it is ready for immediate peace talks with the Tamil Tigers, but rejected their demands for a de-escalation of the war and lifting of the economic embargo ahead of negotiations describing them as "pre-conditions".

"The government has made no demands of the LTTE at all. Both, the government and the President are particularly keen that no time should be lost in addressing the main core issues, that no time should be lost on peripheral and fringe matters," Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar said, adding, "The LTTE says there is mistrust on both sides, so they should start talking and during these talks they can address the issue of building trust. Both should not put conditions before talks begin."

Kadirgamar said they were not imposing conditions on the LTTE but wanted to ensure that talks on "core issues" were concluded within a specified period. "The core issues as the government has consistently maintained are the stoppage of war, the stoppage of all terrorist killings, the resolution of the Tamil people's problems through negotiated political settlement," he said.

The Foreign Minister reading out a statement issued on 12 December and approved by the Presidential Secretariat, responding to the speech made by LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran on 27 November comme-morating the 'Heroes Week', stressed that there will not be a ceasefire or confidence building process before the talks commence adding that "de-escalation of war could be considered only as the talks progress towards a definite stage in resolving the conflict".

In his annual speech on 27 November, the LTTE leader Vellupillai Pirapaharan said, "Our liberation organisation is prepared to participate in negotiations to find a political solution to the ethnic conflict through peaceful means. We are not opposed to peaceful processes of resolving conflicts.... We are not imposing any pre-conditions for peace talks. Yet we insist on the creation of a cordial atmosphere and conditions of normalcy conducive for peace negotiations..... we propose a process of de-escalation of war leading to a cessation of armed hostilities and the creation of a peaceful, cordial environment," adding that "our call for de-escalation and normalisation of civilian life should not be misinterpreted as pre-conditions."

The government statement in response said that "President Chandrika Kumaratunga in her address to Parliament on November 09, 2000, as indeed on many previous occasions, reiterated the government's commitment to a negotiated settlement of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. She has also made it categorically clear that the doors for talks with the LTTE remained open."

The statement identified that an "honest political commitment of the government, the clear agreement of the majority of all Sri Lankans, and an end to the war and all forms of terrorist activity" as pre-requisites for the achievement of such a settlement.

Stressing the importance of "honest participation of the LTTE" in any negotiations, the statement said that the repeated offer of this government to engage in talks had been constantly evaded by the LTTE. since August 1994. "During the entire eight months of talks between the government and the LTTE in 1994/1995, discussions on these two essential matters (an end to the war and all forms of terrorist activity) were firmly refused by the LTTE," the statement said.

The government statement added, "The government has noted with interest that even at this late stage, Velupillai Pirabaharan, the LTTE leader, in his November 27 speech has responded somewhat positively to the government's stand on the resumption of talks. In this speech, the LTTE leader committed himself "not to oppose peaceful processes, nor to be against participation in peaceful dialogue.

"However, a careful reading of the LTTE leaders speech gives the impression that his readiness for peace talks is not without ambiguity. He insists on the 'creation of a cordial atmosphere and conditions of normalcy conducive for peace negotiations.' The LTTE leader does not spell out what he means by 'conditions of normalcy'. The government is aware that the LTTE has held and expressed the view that 'conditions of normalcy' include the withdrawal of the armed forces from Jaffna and the Northern Province, as a precondition to the commencement of any talks.

"In the government's view the crucial political issues that affect the future of Sri Lanka should not be evaded any longer. The government states that political talks with the LTTE, aimed at resolving the conflict, can and should begin forthwith. This requires that the LTTE agree that the core issues should comprise the agenda of negotiations. The core issues, as the government has consistently maintained, are:- the stoppage of war, the stoppage of all terrorist killings, the resolution of the Tamil

(Continued from page 6)

world which closed its eyes and observed a studied silence when Jaffna was invaded militarily by the Sri Lankan army and as a consequence a monumental tragedy occurred when half a million Tamils were uprooted and displaced", he observed. "Jaffna does not belong to the Sinhala nation. Jaffna belongs to the people of Jaffna. Sovereignty is not a divine right of a State. Sovereignty derives from the people; it is an inalienable right of a people. It is the people of Jaffna who has sovereign right over the Jaffna peninsula. The Sinhala nation cannot impose its sovereignty over the historically constituted lands of the Tamils by military aggression and occupation. As the liberation army of our people we will not allow our traditional lands to be occupied by alien forces. Whatever the challenges we have to face, regardless of the obstacles we must overcome, whichever force opposes us, our liberation movement is determined to liberate Jaffna", Mr Pirapaharan declared. ■

people's problems through negotiated political settlement and a speedy resolution of the problems of those displaced by war, etc.

"Mr. Pirabaharan has also expressed his desire for 'a process of de-escalation of war leading to cessation of armed hostilities.' This is proposed almost as a precondition for talks. In the government's view the de-escalation of war could be considered only as the talks progress towards a definitive stage in resolving the conflict.

"The government is acutely aware that there are difficulties faced by the civilian population, in conflict areas, in the North and East. This is due to the inescapable fact that there is an on-going war for which the LTTE bears a heavy responsibility. The government wishes to remind the LTTE leader that it has taken every possible step to improve the conditions of civilian life in areas under government control. It has to be emphasized that it is the LTTE that has constantly disrupted the supply of goods and services to the people in the Northern and Eastern provinces. The government is of the view that issues concerning the normalization of civilian life could also be discussed in the course of the proposed talks.

The LTTE leader has claimed sovereignty over Jaffna, while issuing a challenge to the State that his movement will 'regain Jaffna.' The government's position as has been clearly reiterated to all concerned is that Sri Lanka is a single sovereign State, the territorial integrity of which is not, and cannot be put, in question; nor is it a negotiable issue. The government also reiterates that Sri Lanka is a multiethnic, multi- religious, pluralistic State in which there is no space for monoethnic political entities. The government and its armed forces shall continue to defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Sri Lanka.

"Finally, the government wishes to state that the time has come to move beyond rhetoric to the discussion of concrete political issues, within a definite time frame with a clear political outcome in view."

In answer to journalists the Minister said, "There will not be any withdrawal of troops from Jaffna, the LTTE is a matured terrorist organisation, they are not babies, they are perfectly capable of talking peace while fighting," the Minister said.

Kadirgamar also said that with the failed peace talks in 1994 and 1995, the government this time would adopt a very cautious attitude when conducting peace talks. He noted that on both these occasions the LTTE had called for peace talks and then violated the talks by resuming the fighting. "This is not a game for novices, the government will not accept any bargains or trade offs this time," the Minister asserted. Stating that the LTTE had totally rejected a peace move made by the government in May this year, he believed that the Norwegian facilitation had something to do with the LTTE's present consent to peace move. The presence and participation by a third party facilitator will add new hope for successful peace talks, the Minister said.

Support for Talks:

Following the government's statement on the previous day in response to the LTTE leader's offer of peace talks, some Tamil political leaders on 13 December urged the government and Tamil Tigers to abandon their fixed positions and enter talks without pre-conditions.

They welcomed the governmen"s announcement that it was ready to enter talks with LTTE, but said both sides must be willing to make a start without imposing conditions. "We welcome the government saying that it wants to open talks," said former Member of Parliament Dharmalingam Sidharthan who leads the Democratic People's Liberation Front (DPLF).

Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) said the government must not give the LTTE an excuse to back out of talks. "Prabhakaran has for the first time broached the subject of a negotiated peace," TULF senior vice president. V. Anandasangari said. "By saying no to a ceasefire before the talks, the government should not give the LTTE an opportunity to back out," he said adding that having Norway as a facilitator could help sort out ambiguities in the LTTE's offer of talks made on November 27. On the issue whether there should be a ceasefire before commencement of talks, Mr. Anandasangaree said that he favoured one saying, "when you hit a man, he will always hit back." But it was now up to the Norwegian facilitators to break the deadlock. "That is what they are there for. They must intervene and get both parties to agree for a ceasefire." Only negotiations conducted in the background of a ceasefire would yield "good results," Anandasangaree said.

Welcoming the government statement, the TULF General-Secretary R. Sampanthan said, "The TULF has always been for a negotiated settlement and is of the hope that the Government would expeditiously begin the process as a solution for the settlement of the crisis and the problems of the minorities."

EPDP spokesman and Jaffna District MP S. Thavarajah said, "We welcome the proposals by the government to have talks with the LTTE and we have no objections to these talks. However, the LTTE has not instilled sufficient confidence in the people yet and it is up to them to prove the sincerity of their intentions."

EPRLF General Secretary Suresh Premachandran said, "We will support the Government if the LTTE's efforts are sincere. It is high time that a solution to this long drawn out conflict has been determined." ●

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NEWS REVIEW

• JAFFNA BISHOP: "SEIZE LAST CHANCE FOR A SOLUTION"

The Bishop of Jaffna, Rev Thomas Savundaranayagam, has appealed to the people of Sri Lanka to seize the current opportunity to find a peaceful solution to the ethnic conflict now tearing the island, because this may well be the last chance. Speaking at a meeting of the Colombo branch of the Old Boys' Association of St Henry's College, Ilavaalai, Jaffna, on Sunday 10 December, the Tamil north's most prominent religious dignitary said: "A good opportunity to find a peaceful solution has now arisen. We should not let this opportunity slip out of our hands. We cannot expect the same kind of general interest in finding a peaceful solution to arise again."

He pointed out that the LTTE had offered to talk without preconditions and that the Norwegian government had held out a helping hand and said that this situation must be utilised to find a solution through "ahimsa" (non-violence). He deprecated the statements of some forces which wanted a solution only through war and were against Norwegian involvement.

Pointing out to the urgency of a solution from the point of view of the people of Jaffna, Bishop Savundaranayagam said that there was only one class of people living in Jaffna, "the poor who live on the mercy of others".

He said there was no stratification based on education or class now in Jaffna because the well heeled, the educated and the middle classes had fled the land leaving only the poor. The Catholic community had been particularly hard hit and its structures had to be dismantled in as many as 12 places in the past year because of the war. "It is time we thought of the poor and took the finding of a peaceful solution as a challenge," he said.

The Bishop who left after his visit to Colombo to the LTTE held Vanni area on a three day visit, in an interview with a Colombo newspaper said that he had embarked on the visit as a messenger of peace and "if the opportunity arose" he would inspire the LTTE leadership regarding peace talks. Describing as extremely positive the Heroes' day speech of the LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran, Bishop Saundranayagam said that the LTTE leader's calls for peace 'should be taken at face value'.

He said that the Government should immediately explore the possibilities of initiating a peace approach as a follow up to the LTTE leader's expressed readiness for talks. Asked whether he was confident that the LTTE would not demand the removal of troops from the North and East before the commencement of talks, Bishop Saundranayagam said that according to what he gathered from the Tiger leader's speech, the LTTE would not do so.

The fact that the LTTE leader had not made references to Eelam or a separate state in his speech indicated that it was a positive sign for the peace process, the Bishop added.

The Bishop had sent a congratulatory message to Mr. Prabhakaran soon after the LTTE leader had met Norwegian peace envoy Erik Solheim and expressed his willingness to come forward for talks with the government. "I requested Prabhakaran to proceed with the matter further. We are happy that the LTTE leader has not demanded any conditions for talks", the Bishop said.

The Bishop met the Opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe in Colombo and said that the UNP leader had agreed to his request to assist the government to initiate peace talks in a bid to find an amicable solution to the ongoing war.

"Since arriving in Colombo I have spoken to the leader of the opposition and requested him to see that others do not sabotage the proposed peace talks when the LTTE itself has consented. I also met the UNP Vice President and MP Karu Jayasuriya and requested him to help promote peace talks. Some evil forces are uttering that these peace talks are not necessary for us, only war is needed and they would find a settlement in war. Therefore I have appealed to them to work against such people. I also visited the Canadian High Commission and explained the situation. I have also met Ronnie De Mel and had talks on the subject through out. These are some of the ways in which we help humanity.

Meanwhile, the Bishops of the Catholic Church who met in Conference recently decided, as a measure for peace, to take the statue of our Lady of Madhu from the north to the southern parts of Sri Lanka. The statue is to be taken in procession to Chilaw, Kurunegala, Colombo and Anuradhapura They also expressed full support to the Norwegian government sponsored peace effort. On behalf of all the Bishops, Bishop Ranjith of Ratnapura diocese, released the report which said that both warring factions must abandon the war in order to find peace.

• PEACE PROCESS SHOULD START WITHOUT DELAY

The National Peace Council of Sri Lanka, in a statement issued on 30 November said, "The offer of unconditional peace talks made by LTTE leader Velupillai Prabakaran in his annual Heroes Day speech is a welcome one. The issue of pre-conditions prior to peace talks was previously seen as a major obstacle to the resumption of peace talks.

The LTTE leader's offer comes at a time when the international community has been showing a great deal of interest in promoting the peace process. The role of the foreign facilitators has become very important at this stage in the breaking of deadlocks that block the peace process.

An example concerns the parameters of a negotiated settlement. A few weeks ago, the Norwegian peace envoy Erik Solheim set the parameters of a negotiated settlement which the government and LTTE had far failed to do by themselves. The parameters set are the unity of Sri Lanka within which Tamil aspirations must be met. It is important to note that neither the government nor LTTE have rejected these parameters.

The visiting British Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Peter Hain offered the example of the United Kingdom in which the devolution of power has taken place as part of a political solution to

the question of nationalities. The National Peace Council believes that it is essential to meet the Tamil aspiration for self-determination within a democratic framework through the negotiation process.

At this time the two conflicting parties themselves appear to be in two minds about committing themselves wholeheartedly to the negotiation process. Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake has recently being saying that terrorism must first be crushed militarily. On the very day that the LTTE leader made his offer of unconditional peace talks a landmine blew up a civilian bus with many civilian casualties.

The NPC believes that it is crucially important at this time is to get the peace process started without further delay and loss of lives and property. Going by the experience of previous peace processes, both locally and internationally, contradictory rhetoric and actions are to be expected at the outset of negotiations. They manifest the mistrust and suspicions of the two sides that can only be lessened through the confidence-building that accompanies face to face dialogue and peace talks."

PEACE TALKS ONLY IF BAN IS LIFTED, SAYS LTTE

The LTTE in a statement from its London international headquarters has stipulated that its proscription in Sri Lanka should be lifted before it would enter into the Norwegian sponsored peace negotiations with the government of Sri Lanka.

The ban on the LTTE was imposed by the Sri Lankan government on 26 January 1998 soon after one of its suicide squads drove an explosive laden truck into the island's most hallowed Buddhist place of worship, the Sri Dalada Maligawa, resulting in considerable damage to the temple and generating feelings of much popular outrage.

The Tamil Tigers, as the LTTE is popularly known, are proscribed in Sri Lanka, India and the USA. The LTTE argues that the creation of a conducive atmosphere is essential as a prerequisite for any peace talks to commence, and such an atmosphere cannot be created if the ban imposed against it remains in force.

The Sri Lankan government has also been carrying on a sustained campaign, notably in western capitals, to secure the outlawing of the LTTE on the alleged ground that the Tamil Tigers and their front-organisations have been engaged in fundraising for "terrorist operations" in Sri Lanka in pursuit of their goal for a separate state. The Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Mr Lakshman Kadirgamr has been engaged in this campaign for some time now, and it is learnt that President Chandrika Kumaratunga has urged the British government to ban the LTTE during her recent visit.

The Tamil Tigers also say that so long as the government continues to engage in such a campaign, it cannot provide the right climate for peace negotiations to commence.

Meanwhile, Britain said on December 11 that it would take into account the Sri Lankan Government's request to ban LTTE from functioning from its soil while preparing a list of international terrorist organisations to be proscribed operating from the country.

The British High Commissioner in Colombo, Linda Duffield, rejecting local newspaper reports criticising the British Government for harbouring senior LTTE leaders like Mr Anton Balasingham, who is functioning as LTTE's chief spokesman from London, said that UK was determined that its soil should not be used as a base for spreading terrorism," adding that "Britain is considering which organisation to ban and will take into account the Sri Lankan Government's request that the LTTE be proscribed."

Newspaper reports in Colombo alleged that Mr Balasingham, in the course of his speech at a "Great Heroes Day" commemoration held in London on 3 December, had reportedly said that if the Tamil Tigers were banned, they would turn into "real terrorists". "We have told the British government that if you lay hands on us, we will not come for peace talks. Whether it is peace initiatives by the European countries or anyone else's attempts to bring peace, we will close the door to peace," Mr Balasingham is reported to have said. At the same time he is alleged to have said that a ban would not be effective and prevent the LTTE from functioning pointing out the example of the ban imposed on it in the USA from where, he claimed that more funds had poured into the LTTE coffers following the ban.

The British High Commissioner said in her statement said: "Far from being soft on terrorism, we are determined that the UK should not be used as a base for the planning and preparation of terrorism. The Terrorism Act of July 2000 is a clear signal of our condemnation of terrorism and our determination to take firm measures against those who engage in terrorist activity. The UK consulted widely in drafting this legislation, including the Sri Lankan Government. There is a gap of around six months before the legislation comes into effect. Such a gap is normal, and is necessary for the Act to be implemented fully. The time is being used to train the police, magistrates, draw up the criteria for proscription and the appeals mechanism. The UK is actively preparing to step up its campaign to combat terrorism.

"Recommendations to Parliament on which international terrorist organizations should be proscribed under the Terrorist Act will be made early next year, after the Act comes into force. Part I of the Act broadens the definition of terrorism in UK legislation to include organizations other than those related to Northern Ireland terrorism. Britain is considering which organizations to ban and will take into account of the Sri Lankan Governments request that the LTTE be proscribed."

Duffield's remarks come in after Britain's junior Foreign Minister Peter Hain said in Colombo last month that the British government was "very seriously considering" a request from Colombo to ban the LTTE.

It is no secret that the LTTE has offices functioning in many capitals of the world operating a network of propaganda outfits including a number of web sites. Its main functions are performed from western countries and Australia where there has been a large influx of Sri Lankan Tamils mainly due to the ongoing ethnic war in the island.

Very few believe that a ban on the

LTTE on the US or Indian style is imminent or likely in the near future in other countries. However, diplomatic sources are of the view that there is a strong likelihood that the international community could put pressure on the LTTE to enter peace talks towards a negotiated settlement with the government of Sri Lanka by threatening to target the group's international operations.

• GOVT SEEKS ICRC HELP TO PROTECT DOCTORS

Sri Lanka's health ministry has asked the International Committee of the Red Cross to help provide protection to doctors serving in war-torn areas of the north-east of the country. The Health Minister, John Seneviratne, said he directed ministry officials to seek ICRC aid in transporting doctors working in LTTE controlled and government controlled areas.

The Minister also announced that the government would extend an insurance cover for all doctors serving in the strife-torn region and pay them a special allowance.

The Government Medical Officers' Association had made these demands recently after many doctors deserted hospitals in the eastern Batticaloa and other eastern districts. The doctors fled the district following a landmine explosion allegedly carried out by the LTTE on 6 December.

The GMOA president, Wimal Jayantha, said 54 doctors working in the eastern districts of Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Ampara districts had returned to Colombo and refused to go back to the hospitals.

Dr. Duke Arulpragasam, travelling in the ill-fated Colombo bound bus which left Batticaloa succumbed to his injuries on 8 December at Colombo's National hospital. The bus which went over a clay more mine, exploded, injuring 23 passengers including three doctors who were serving at the Batticaloa Teaching Hospital and who were on their way to Colombo on leave. The two other doctors are still in intensive care. Four passengers died on the spot.

The Government Medical Officers Association (GMOA) meanwhile is taking action to bring back all doctors who are serving in hospitals in high risk areas.

Jayantha said that another 350 doctors working in war zones would also be returning to Colombo immediately. "Doctors in Vavuniya, Mannar, Kalmunai and other areas have informed us that if the government does not take action immediately they would return to Colombo without further notice," he said.

A GMOA official said a similar situation had arisen in the northern Jaffna peninsula in May this year after the Tigers shelled the area. Many Sinhala doctors working at the Jaffna teaching hospital fled the peninsula when shells hit the hospital building.

Private medical practitioners and retired doctors stepped in to maintain health services and treat civilians wounded in the shelling as government doctors returned to the capital in the south of the island.

According to the health minister, John Seneviratne, Sri Lanka plans to get doctors from Cuba, India and Philippines to fill surgeon vacancies. Only 56 surgeons were practising in a country serving a population of 18.7 million. With one surgeon available to some 300,000 people, the public health service provided by the government has suffered badly.

• DEFENCE SPENDING RUINS ISLAND'S ECONOMY

Sri Lanka's successful bid to keep the Tamil Tigers out of the northern town of Jaffna has come at a heavy price with massive defence spending blasting a hole in the national budget.

Military spending leapt to Rs.83 billion ($1.04 billion), up from the Rs.52.43 billion estimate made earlier this year, Deputy Finance Minister G. L. Peiris said on 5 December while presenting an interim budget in Parliament. He told legislators that the government's heavy spending on emergency arms supplies to reinforce embattled troops in the north had widened the budget deficit to 8.7 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). The deficit this year was previously estimated to be around 7.5 per cent of GDP.

In the past few weeks the private sector has been stunned by snowballing interest rates that climbed to a dizzy 25 per cent from 12 per cent, with the government absorbing as much cash as possible. The cash-strapped government has been issuing treasury bills with a steep 22 per cent return, making it a popular investment choice while commercial banks are offering higher than usual interest on short-term deposits.

At Colombo's tiny stock market, the share price index has been dipping steadily, a slide that even the prospect of peace talks between the government and the LTTE has not halted.

The Colombo Stock Exchange (CSE), which has an average daily turnover of Rs.25 million ($312,000), recently announced moves to deregulate share trading by waiving several listing requirements in a bid to perk up local interest. The move came as the market remained in the doldrums amid continuous foreign selling.

Said an exasperated Elton Ebert, a trader on the CSE, "Market? What market? Cigarettes are more expensive than some shares in the Colombo market."

Having declared 2000 as their "Year of War," the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), fighting for a separate homeland in the island's north and east, launched an intensified campaign in April this year to wrest the northern Jaffna peninsula from government control. After overrunning three key Army bases, the Tigers trained their sights on the peninsula's most important town, Jaffna. Colombo went on a shopping spree to several countries, including China, Pakistan, Israel and India, for military hardware. Newly bought multi-barrel rocket launchers, refitted Kfir jets, MIG-27 swing-wing jets and Mi-24 helicopter gun-ships have since been largely instrumental for holding the Tigers at bay.

Following the sudden upsurge in fighting, the country was put on a "war footing" in May, diverting funds from non-essential development projects to the battlefront.

Despite hiking taxes, excise duties and rates as well as devaluing the rupee against the dollar by a six per cent, government economists, however, like to paint a rosy picture. Said Min-

ister Peiris: "Sri Lanka has been successful in achieving six per cent growth in the first six months of this year. This is more than the growth recorded by (neighboring) India. Sri Lanka's per capita income is even twice as much as that of India."

With the December 18 Sri Lanka Aid Group meeting, a conclave of donor countries, coming up, political analysts see the country's economic troubles as the most forceful reason why the ruling People's Alliance coalition has to open a dialogue with the LTTE.

Despite strong persuasion from India, the US and Britain, President Kumaratunga has yet to wholeheartedly signal that she is interested in sitting down for talks with LTTE.

"The economic imperative is the strongest motivation the government now has to talk to the LTTE," a Western diplomat said.

Meanwhile, the Manila-based Asian Development Bank said it has approved a $240 loan package to Sri Lanka for 2001. John Cooney, ADB resident representative, said that an additional $25 million will be allocated for small-scale infrastructure development in the war-torn northeast. The bank also has approved an extra $8.25 million as technical assistance.

The 2001 loan plan of $240 million will be channeled through the bank's Asian Development Fund and Ordinary Capital Resources or OCR. The ADB's loan plan for 2000 is estimated at $209 million.

Next year's ADF component of $140 million has a lower, highly concessional interest rate of 1.5% per year, while the OCR component is in line with commercial rates at 6.5% per year, he said.

Cooney said the loan plan aims at improving Sri Lanka's transport, power and financial sector. Labor reforms and the restructuring of state banks will also be carried out with these loans.

Beginning 2002, all loans will be tied to stringent regulations, Cooney said. "The bank will begin a formal process for performance-based lending," he said, adding that the assessments will be based on countrywide performance and portfolio-wide performance.

The ADB has provided nearly $2.36 billion in soft loans to Sri Lanka from 1968 through 1999.

• PRESIDENT IN TALKS WITH BRITISH LEADERS

President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who is currently on an official visit to Britain held a series of meetings and discussions with Robin Cook, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Richard Caborn, Minister of State for Trade and was hosted to tea by the All Party Parliamentary Sri Lanka Group in the British House of Parliament on the 28th of November.

President Kumaratunga also attended the annul luncheon hosted by the Friends of Sri Lanka Association on the same day.

The President and Foreign Secretary Robin Cook held discussions on issues which are of mutual interest to Sri Lanka and Britain. The discussions held at the Sri

Lanka High Commission in London, also included the Government's proposals for solving the ethnic issue. Sri Lanka's High Commissioner in London, Mangala Moonesinghe was associated with the discussions.

Earlier, Mr. Richard Caborn, Minister of State for Trade called on President Kuamratunga and discussed investment prospects for British investors in Sri Lanka. President Kumaratunga explained to Minister Caborn the many advantages and facilities for foreign investors in Sri Lanka. President Kumaratunga also requested Minister Caborn to send a team of British experts to conduct a study on the power sector in Sri Lanka.

Later that day, President Kumaratunga was hosted to tea by the All Party Parliamentary Sri Lanka Group at the House of Parliament at a function organised by Lord Naseby, the Co-Chairman of the Group. The President briefed the members of the Group on Sri Lanka and thanked them for the interest they take on Sri Lankan affairs.

The All Party Parliamentary Sri Lanka Group was formed by Lord Naseby in 1975 and comprises of Parliamentarians from the three main political parties, which includes Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrats, is co-chaired by Labour M.P. Tom Cox and Lord Naseby of the Conservative party. The Group was formed to facilitate communication and understanding between the people of Sri Lanka and the UK Parliamentarians of both countries and to strengthen further bi-lateral cooperation.

On 29th November, President Kumaratunga called on Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace and was accorded a warm and friendly reception.

The President also attended the annual lunch hosted by the Friends of Sri Lanka Association the same day. Former British High Commissioner to Colombo, John Field, President of Friends of Sri Lanka warmly welcomed

President Kumaratunga and Sri Lanka's High Commissioner Mangala Moonesinghe and Mrs. Moonesinghe. President Kumaratunga addressed the gathering and received a standing ovation at the conclusion of her address.

• TRAFFICKING AND ABUSE OF CHILDREN

Most of the child trafficking in Sri Lanka takes place within the country. and children who live with their parents are taken for physical labour. National Child Protection Authority. Chairman, Professor Dr. Harendra de Silva said at the Launching of a project on 8 December by the International Labour Organisation(ILO)- and the International Program for Eradication of Child Labour(IPEC) to combat the trafficking of Children for exploitative employment purposes.Dr. De Silva further said that these children were invariably prone to abuse of various forms.

Dr Silva said that children are taken from estate areas for domestic labour. "Children are taken to the beaches of Hikkaduwa, Negombo and other coastal areas not merely to serve foreign paedophiles but also to the locals as well," Dr. De Silva said. Children are brought from places like Madawachchiya, and Anuradhapura to railway stations and even to the Galle Face Green for this nefarious activities, he said.

· SRI LANKA NAVY LAUNCHES AIR WING

The Sri Lanka navy launched an air wing on 9 December by taking delivery of its first helicopter ship.

"The first of two Indian-built "Sukanya" class offshore patrol vessels were received by the Sri Lanka navy, laying the foundation for the aerial wing," said a senior navy officer, who did not want to be identified.

He declined to say how much the vessel had cost, but said it had been used by the Indian navy for several years and that a second ship was being built.

The officer said the vessel, which has a displacement of 1,890 tonnes, can carry one combat helicopter and a crew of 140. "We will use the aerial wing as much for surveillance as for combat purposes," he said.

Sri Lanka's tiny navy is used largely for coastal patrols and to supply troops fighting the Tamil Tigers in the country's north and east. The Tiger have their own sea-borne unit and often inflict heavy losses on the navy with daring suicide attacks.

· CRICKET PROBE: LANKA SEEKS INDIAN HELP

The Cricket Board of Sri Lanka has sought the Indian government's help in probing the match fixing allegations against some the country's high-ranking players. The move follows refusal by the key Indian bookie, M K Gupta, to co-operate with Desmond Fernando, a leading lawyer, who has been appointed by the Board to investigate the corruption allegations against popular cricket idols like former skipper Arjuna Ranatunga and his deputy Aravinda de Silva. Mr Fernando, who will be joined by International Cricket Council's anti-corruption chief Sir Paul Condon, the former head of the London's Metropolitan Police force, are to meet two Indian ministers shortly in New Delhi to discuss matters concerning the investigation.

Mr Fernando will meet with India's minister of sports as well as the Minister ofLaw, according to a statement issued by the Cricket Board. He had sought help from the Indian High Commission in Colombo to arrange an interview with Gupta after he was given a one-month deadline by Sri Lanka's Cricket Control Board to investigate the allegations contained in a report by Indian investigative agency CBI.

Fernando, a lawyer by profession and Sri Lanka's representative in the ICC's Code of Conduct Committee, also travelled to London for talks with ICC officials.

Sri Lanka's former vice captain, Aravinda de Silva, has said he was approached by bookmakers with offers to fix matches, but he denied accepting bribes or any acts of wrongdoing.

· PEACE FOR SRI LANKA

At a moment when the Oslo peace process in the Mideast appears in dire trouble, there has been a heartening breakthrough toward another peace negotiation that Norway is seeking to midwife.

With his call last Monday for unconditional peace talks between his Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Sri Lankan government, Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran offered a positive response to the signals transmitted by Norway's peace envoy Erik Solheim.

In the past, Prabhakaran had insisted that negotiations had to be preceded by a cease-fire and a withdrawal of government troops from the Tamil provinces in the north and east of the island nation off India. But Solheim, meeting the Tiger chieftain in a jungle hideout on Nov. 1, conveyed the objections of President Chandrika Kumaratunga to any preconditions for peace talks. Because the Tigers have a history of using a negotiating interlude to regroup and rearm and then to break off talks with a dramatic military strike, Chandrika could not take the political risk of conceding to a cease-fire and a troop withdrawal before starting peace talks.

A crucial reason why successive Sri Lankan governments have been unable or unwilling to grant some form of autonomy to the Tamil provinces and terminate a 17-year war that has snuffed out 60,000 lives has been the intransigence of Sinhalese ultra-nationalists and chauvinistic Buddhist monks. Indeed, nationalists burned an effigy of the Norwegian peacemaker Solheim in front of the Norwegian embassy two weeks ago, denouncing his mediation efforts and shouting, "Norway out!"

Both sides in Sri Lanka's long and merciless ethnic conflict have perpetrated atrocities. Both have contributed to a pathology of violence and vengeance. In this futile war without end, civilians have been killed and uprooted, and a country possessing the human and natural resources to partake in the economic progress of its neighbours has been left behind to stew in its own juices.

The Sri Lankan government will be acting in the best interest of all Sri Lankans if it responds to the recent gestures from Prabhakaran. Since he met Chandrika's political need for peace talks without preconditions, she should now respond to his suggestions for "the creation of a cordial atmosphere and conditions of normalcy conducive for peace negotiations." This means tamping down military operations and easing an economic embargo on the Tamil areas.

Most important, the government must come forward with an offer of confederation for the Tamil provinces, so that they may govern themselves within a Sri Lanka that retains its territorial integrity.

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Extradition: An Attempt At Muddying the Waters?

Shanthi Rajan

How come the question of extradition of the LTTE leader Pirapaharan for plotting the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has suddenly cropped up with a flurry of reports and comments in particularly Indian newspapers only to be picked up to be given currency in the Sri Lankan media? Not only journalists, the Indian political and security establishment would appear to have shown renewed interest in the subject which had remained un-raised for years.

Some say that events connected with the kidnapping of the Karnataka popular film actor Rajkumar by Veerappan, the notorious sandalwood smuggler and fugitive from justice, and the circumstances surrounding actor's eventual release had drawn the attention of Indian intelligence agencies to the "LTTE factor" in the politics of southern India.

Some others suspect that, in the context of the current efforts to resuscitate peace negotiations between the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE with Norwegian participation, the raising of the issue of extraditing Pirapaharan at this time is deliberately intended by certain sections of the Indian establishment to sabotage these efforts.

While on the one hand India seemed to be fully backing the Norwegian-European initiative for peace, on the other, there have been Indian inspired developments which gave the impression that India was peevish and playing some strange game.

It will be remembered that the last time the issue of Pirapaharan's extradition was overtly raised was when in late 1994, after her victory in the August 1994 election, Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga paid a visit to New Delhi. This was the time the Sri Lankan government had commenced negotiations with the LTTE, and it is said that the way the issue was raised and the importance and publicity given to it in the India media upset the LTTE leader a great deal, and from then on he became gravely suspicious about the motivations of Colombo and New Delhi.

Advani's Bombshell

On this occasion the bombshell of extradition was dropped by no less a person than the Indian Home Affairs Minister Mr L K Advani. According to "The Hindu" (International), December 02, 2000 Mr Advani, told the Indian Parliament on 1 December that the Multi-Disciplinary Monitoring Agency (MDMA) had visited Sri Lanka from 13 to 23 November 2000 and pressed for the extradition of the LTTE leader when it met Sri Lanka's Attorney-General and the Solicitor-General adding that the Centre and the State Governments were keeping a close watch on the activities of the LTTE and its sympathisers, including those of Tamil Nadu Liberation Army(TNLA) and Tamil Nadu Retrieval Force(TNRF), two groups operating in Tamil Nadu known to pro-LTTE.

Until Advani's announcement, the visit by the MDMA had remained a secret. However, it is now known that a three-member CBI team comprising M.N. Thiagarajah, N. Mishra and S.V. Sivaprakasam were in Colombo on a ten-day visit talking to heads of important Government Departments and State agencies.

The MDMA's work is part of an extensive investigation into political aspects of the assassination of the former Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi. A call to probe such aspects had been made by the Jain Commission. Justice M.C. Jain probed the larger conspiracy behind the Rajiv Gandhi killing. India's Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has sought Sri Lanka's help to establish links between several Tamil Nadu politicians and the LTTE.

Mr. Advani's announcement in Parliament followed questions from Congress MPs as to what action the Government had taken on LTTE activities in the wake of reports of birthday celebrations of Mr. Pirpaharan in Tamil Nadu. The State government, Mr Advani said, acted promptly and removed posters depicting the LTTE leader, arrested people from Cuddalore, Thanjavur and Virudhunagar and also registered three cases in Chennai in this connection.

Doubts in Colombo

India had asked Colombo for the extradition of Pirapaharan for the first time in June 1985 but had not pursued it. Speaking to The Hindu last month (November), Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar expressed confidence that India was no longer very interested in pursuing the extradition matter. "I have felt no vibrations at all about this question. The formal request is there, it's been lying there for years now. No government of India has pressed us to do anything, because it is not a possibility, realistically speaking. If talks were to begin, the possibility might arise but it is one of those hypotheses that we have not yet explored. It is not right to explore that. We are letting things lie as they are at the moment. he said.

Doubts have been raised in Colombo whether in fact the India MDMA team raise the question of extradition. News reports in Colombo quoted the island's Attorney General K.C. Kamalasabayson as saying that Indian officials had not specifically asked for Pirapaharan's extradition this time. According to the AG the Indian team only wanted to interview a member of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) identified as "Nixon" who is currently in police custody in Colombo for his role in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination and it was allowed to do so.

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wikramanayake said in an interview to the Tamil language daily Thinakaran on that the LTTE leader would not be extradited to India. "We will not do such a dirty thing," he said. Mr Wikramanayake was answering a

question as to whether Sri Lanka would hand over Pirapaharan to face trial in India as sought by India, when there were possibilities of peace talks with him in Sri Lanka.

Strange Coincidence

Even the Interpol had by a strange coincidence been activated by some source. On 4 December 2000 on its website wanted notices on the LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and several other senior LTTE cadres were issued. Among them were Pottu Amman Selliah Navaratnam and Charles.

The notices said that these men are wanted for murder, terrorism and terrorism conspiracy, and that the arrests warrants had been issued from Colombo, Sri Lanka and Madras, India.

The distinguishing marks and characteristics described on Prabhakaran states that he is very alert, known to use disguise and capable of handling sophisticated weaponry and explosives, hair combed back and stout build. Described as of Sri Lankan nationality and languages spoken as Singhalese, Tamil and English, his date of birth is given as 26 November 1954(46 years old) and his place of birth is given as Munil/ Uduwil, Jaffna.

The Interpol's notice and India's renewed demand for Pirabhakaran's extradition for trial by Indian courts have come at a time when Sri Lanka is seriously considering LTTE leader's offer of 'unconditional' talks. Analysts say that Interpol's notice and India's demand could hamper peace prospects in Sri Lanka.

Indian commentators say that it is undeniable that, so far as India is concerned, the LTTE problem has become more complicated because of India's own domestic political reasons. The presence in the ruling coalition at the Centre of a party which is openly supportive of the Tamil Tigers is evidence of the new factors that have come into play. It is not only the MDMK which espouses the cause of a Tamil Eelam, support for it has also been voiced by the Shiv Sena. While, arguably their presence in the ruling coalition compels these parties at least to voice their sentiments with some restraint, it also means that they can generally function with much greater freedom by virtue of their proximity to power.

Secessionist Groups

The issue has become even more complex in the aftermath of the Veerappan episode which brought to light the presence of Tamil secessionist groups in India.

Both the Tamil Nadu Liberation Army(TNLA) and the Tamil Nadu Liberation Front(TNLF) stand for the "liberation of Tamil Nadu" are avowedly separatist. The former is the militant wing of the latter.

Now, there is a website homepage, solely on the TNLF and its "army" chief, Maran. Opening with a map of "Greater Tamil Nadu" which comprises Tamil Nadu, Jaffna, Kerala and parts of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, the TNLF's "research division", lists out the outfit's four-point goals.

The TNLF's goals, according to the website, are "secession of Tamil Nadu from the so-called Indian Union, reunification of Eelam with liberated Tamil Nadu, reunification of Kerala with liberated Tamil Nadu and restoration of lost lands to Greater Tamil Nadu, including Kolar gold fields, Maldives, Malnadu, Lakshadweep and Mauritius."

The website also features a picture of Maran and hails him as a "true Tamil warrior" who has "vowed to destroy the anti-Tamil activities in the so-called Indian Union." And, Veerappan is "not a brigand, he is the brigadier of the TNLF Front".

The evidently stern line that Delhi is taking against alleged pro-LTTE groups like the Tamil National Liberation Army, (TNLA) Tamil National Retrieval Troops and Tamil Nadu Liberation Front (TNRT) in the context of their reported connections with Veerappan's kidnapping saga has had its impact also on the political conduct of the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, M Karunanidhi. Having recently warned pro-LTTE outfits in the State against stretching their rhetoric "beyond limits", he told reporters on 5 December that his government would not be averse to banning the TNLA and TNRT. Though these groups had only a handful of cadres, "if necessary we will recommend to the Centre to ban these outfits," Mr Karunanidhi said. He also rejected MDMK leader Mr Vaiko's call for the lifting of the ban on the LTTE reiterating that there was no change in the DMK's policy of having lost all sympathy for the LTTE against whom the ban had been extended on the advice of his State government.

On the other hand, Tamil Nadu based political parties, MDMK and PMK, partners in the National Democratic Alliance's (NDA) which is in power in Delhi, have exerted pressure on the government to withdraw a notice sent to the Sri Lanka Government for extradition of Pirapaharan.

Impact on Peace Talks

In Colombo, however, the news that India is pressing ahead with the extradition request has caused concern among those who are advocating talks with the LTTE and who see a glimmer of hope for peace after Mr. Pirapaharan's recent statement offering 'unconditional talks' with the Government. Particularly the Tamil political parties have expressed surprise at India's sudden interest on the issue of extradition of the LTTE leader at this juncture.

Commenting on the Indian request for the extradition of the LTTE leader, "The Island" (Colombo) in its editorial on 2 December said that India, which sees itself as the regional policeman, may not like the West to broker peace in this region. Despite Norway's attempts to involve India in the peace process, India has indicated through its extradition demand that it is not willing to compromise its national interest to impress the world by helping the West broker peace. "It is asking for its pound of flesh in the form of Prabhakaran's head. The signal it has sent to Norway and Britain is - you broker peace but hand over Prabhakaran to us," the paper said.

Another Colombo newspaper, "The Sunday Leader" said, "The Indian minister's statement, coming on the heels of the internationally-backed Norwegian peace initiative, is viewed as a subtle move to thwart the peace process in Sri Lanka by sending a message to Prabhakaran that he will have to face a charge of murder if he enters the democratic mainstream and starts negotiations with the government." ●

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PEOPLE & POLITICS

· Crisis Hits Sihala Urumaya

The extreme nationalist political outfit is hit by a major internal crisis with the resignation of its Deputy President Prof.A.D.V. de S. Indraratne who has accused the party's leadership, particularly its national organiser Champika Ranawaka of fraud, criminal trespass and violence.

In his letter sent to the party's Secretary and solitary MP, Mr Thilak Karunaratne, resigning from the post of Deputy President of the Sihala Urumaya and party membership, Prof.Indraratne giving several reasons for his exit from the party.

Among others Prof. Indraratne has disclosed a major fraud perpetrated by certain sections of the SU and the National Movement Against Terrorism, which is constituent of the SU. He has alleged that SU circulated an appeal to Sinhala expatriates in the UK and other countries for funds to be collected and remitted to the account of the NMAT office at Thimbirigasyaya. The letter appealing for financial contributions was purportedly in the name of and from the then party President S.L.Gunasekara, Secretary Thilak Karunaratne and National Organiser Champika Ranawaka. But neither Gunasekara or Karunaratne had knowledge of the appeal or approved it, according to Prof. Indraratne who alleged that this action was a major fraud perpetrated on Sri Lankans living abroad.

Indicating that the fraud came to light before the October parliamentary election, Indratne said in his letter, "You did not place it before the central committee as you "did not want to rock the boat before the election."

He has also alleged that the group led by Champika Ranawaka, the National Organizer, was working on an agenda different from the open, transparent and democratic one espoused by the party constitution.

Indraratne has said he joined the party when Thilak Karunaratne pleaded with him to join it and with the belief that he was joining a group of people with a deep sense of commitment and sacrifice to fight the cause of the Sinhala people , who have been very badly let down by the two major parties. But at the time of his joining the Sihala Urumaya, Champika Ranawaka and his group were already in the party and he did not know at that time the history and background of the group.

Indraratne has also said that in the course of the last election campaign it became apparent to many including the party President and Secretary that the Champika group had their own agenda and that their intention was to get Champika elected to Parliament at any cost.

Professor Indraratne has also been critical of the party secretary Thilak Karunaratne who turned sides during the dispute relating the nomination of the party's national list MP. "To our dismay and horror, you did not send to the Commissioner of Elections the letter conveying the unanimous decision of central committee on 12 October nomnationg SL for the only (national list)seat SU was able to win, and turned against SL, until then your idol, joined Champika group. Reasons for your actions are now well known." The Professor here is alluding to the fact that Thilak Karunaratne, with the agreement of Champika Ranawaka, was later nominated to become MP in place of S L Gunasekera. The deal struck between Karunaratne and Rnawaka is understood to be that the former would resign from parliament after two years making way for the latter to fulfil his cherished ambition of becoming a MP for the rest of the parliamentary term.

For the first time, nearly one-and-a-half months after the incident in which a lieutenant of Champika Ranawaka, Kamal Deshapriya allegedly led a mob of NMAT to Prof. Indraratne's residence, he described in his letter the violence that was deployed on the day: "Even after Champika's crowd criminally trespassed my house and manhandled me, my wife and domestic maid, an ordeal the like of which I have never been subjected to, ever before, I was more concerned with the name and reputation of the party. That was the reason why I requested the police not to "pursue further with my complaint, for interview to the media in order to avoid publicity to the incident."

Indraratne further states, "However, Champika group has engaged in a relentless vilification campaign with distorted versions of the incident itself and concocted stories leading to it, in an attempt to justify their action. Their intransigent, belligerent, self seeking nature was highlighted by their atrocious behaviour at the meeting on 16 October where they were using the most abusive and vituperative words at the party president and us who walked out with him. What hurt me most was your sitting there in acquiescence of all that."

· Deportation of Eelaventhan

M. K. Eelavendhan, a Sri Lankan Tamil, who had been residing in Chenai for more than a decade, was deported to Colombo on 4 December following a Union Home Ministry directive.

Eelavendhan, a former leading member of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) later to breakaway and form the Tamil Eelam Liberation Front(TELF) was picked up by intelligence officers for purposes of "enquiry", but without any further ado was put on a Colombo bound flight.

Eelaventhan has been an outspoken advocate for the establishment of a separate state of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka, and hence was known as a supporter of the Tamil Tigers. His deportation is a clear signal by the Tamil Nadu government that pro-Tamil Tiger activity would not be permitted in the State, commented a journalist. But the official reason given for his expulsion was "his visa had expired and he had overstayed in the country,"

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Muthuvel Karunanidhi told the media on 4 December after a meeting of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) secretaries that his government was in support of banning pro-LTTE outfits like the Tamil Nadu Liberation Army

(TNLA) and the Tamil Nadu Retrieval Force (TNRF). The two groups are suspected to be behind the kidnapping of Kannada actor Rajkumar and are known to back smuggler-poacher Veerappan.

Though Eelaventhan's deportation was portrayed as a simple procedural action – overstaying in the country - sans political connotations, the operation was undertaken with an element of duplicity. Immigration and Police officials in civvies went to Eelaventhan's residence at Arumbakkam in Chennai at about 5 am on 4 December. They informed him that he was to be escorted to the immigration office at "Shastri Bhavan" in Nunga-mbakkam. Instead, the team changed track to Meenambakkam where the Air Port is situated. Realising that he was about to be sent to Colombo, a terrified Eelaventhan sat on the floor protesting non-violently. The officials grabbed the frail, old man and bodily carried him to the Colombo bound plane. Two Indian officials accompanied him to Katunayake. After a brief "interview" officials in Colombo requested Eelaventhan to call over at a convenient time for further interrogation. They gave him fifty Sri Lankan rupees and asked him to "Go" home. A dazed Eelaventhan then made his exit from the Air Port.

Eelaventhan is now reportedly staying with a sister and brother in law in the Colombo suburbs by day. At night he sleeps at the residence of a Tamil Parliamentarian. Since he has been wrongly depicted in the Indian media as an associate of LTTE leader Prabakharan, Eelaventhan fears action by officials of the state, non-LTTE Tamil groups and possibly Sinhala hardline factions. His future in Colombo is uncertain. Moreover his wife and two daughters are in Chennai. The eldest daughter is married to a lecturer at Madras Christian College.

Meanwhile some political forces in India began to act on Eelaventhan's behalf. Dravida Kazgagham leader K. Veeramani was the first to condemn the deportation. Ironically the deportation was in reality a sop to Jayalalitha Jayaram the AIADMK leader whose line Veeramani toes now.

Nedumaran and another Tamil activist Subha. Veerapandian also issued statements criticing the deportation of a non-violent Tamil activist who was in every sense a refugee. Veeramani queried as to how a Tamil refugee would have proper immigration documents.

MDMK leader Vaiko contacted Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee directly in New Delhi. Vajpayee is reported to have telephoned Indian Foreign Minister Jaswanth Singh in Vaiko's presence and given two directives. One was to inform the Sri Lankan High Commissioner Senaka Bandaranaike of this development and to emphasise the safety of Eelaventhan in Colombo. The second was to instruct the Indian envoy in Colombo Gopalakrishna Gandhi to interact with Sri Lankan authorities and ensure the protection of Eelaventhan.Vaiko also obtained an assurance that Eelaventhan's family would not be deported.

As sections of the Indian media have stated Eelaventhan is a "Non-militant". He is also a refugee fearing persecution. If harm befalls him in Sri Lanka as a result of the deportation, New Delhi and Chennai would be placed in an embarrassing position. The fact that Eelaventhan was given an emergency travel document in Chennai and the "light" nature of his preliminary inquiry suggests that the deportation was no surprise to Sri Lanka .Officials of both countries have co-operated in the exercise as in the earlier case of Soundaranayagam who was arrested and deported clandestinely on a flight from Trichy last year. It is also in the interests of Colombo to protect Eelaventhan. In spite of the best intentions, Eelaventhan's safety cannot be guaranteed in Sri Lanka.

It is also apparent that some Tamil politicians in Tamil Nadu would pressurise the Central Government to review the situation and revoke the deportation order. If saner counsel prevails in the Indian corridors of power then Eelaventhan may be allowed at some future stage to slip back to Chennai via a safe third country.

For this to occur , Eelaventhan himself must adopt an uncharacteristically low profile without criticising India. It is also in his own interest to keep mum to avoid unwelcome attention. Steps should also be taken to safeguard the man during his stay in Sri Lanka. The answer is not protective custody or forcible relocation to Jaffna. It is humanely imperative that the man be allowed to unite with his family. Eelaventhan is in every sense a political refugee with reasonable grounds to fear persecution in Sri Lanka. One can only hope that India appreciates this and permit him to return.

· One Leader for SLMC

The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, which has been functioning with two co-leaders following the untimely death of its founding leader M H M Ashraff in a helicopter crash in October this year, is to have a single leader.

The party leadership is at present shared by its General Secretary Rauf Hakeem, and the widow of the late leader, Mrs Ferial Ashraff, both holding cabinet posts in President Chandrika Kumaratunga's government. Mr Hakeem holds the portfolio of Minister for Internal and International Trade and Mrs Ferial Ashraff being the Minister for Development and Reconstruction for the East.

The unexpected death of the SLMC leader produced a leadership crisis in the SLMC. Being a crucial time in the run-up to the October elections, upon the death of her husband, Mrs Ferial Ashraff reached an uneasy truce with Mr Hakeem to serve as co-leaders of the party her late spouse founded. The two however have continued to have disgreements over government portfolio's and internal party politics, splitting the SLMC into two fractious factions, with members taking sides.

The SLMC holds an important position in the country's political balance because of the fact that it provides the required majority for the Peoples Alliance coalition led by President Kumaratunga to remain in power. However the fractured SLMC has suffered considerable dent in its profile mainly for two reasons: one because of the demise of its onetime charismatic leader, and two by reason of its internal divisions.

Since the death of Mr Ashraff, Mr Hakeem would appear to have gained

(continued on next page

Goading the Combatants to the Talking Table

Our Colombo Correspondent

Encouraging Signs

It looks the international community had succeeded in goading the combatants of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict to the talking table. Constitutional Affairs and Industrial Development Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris told Colombo based diplomats on December 6 that the government is ready to "take the bull by the horns". Three days earlier Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake told three Colombo Tamil Weeklies that the government had asked Norway to act officially as a third party facilitator and to bring the parties in conflict to the negotiating table.

"If the LTTE is seen to be sincere the government is prepared to implement a program that would restore normalcy in the north and east in consultation with the UNP and other parties," the Prime Minister said and added that it would be unethical to deport Pirabhaharan to India while the peace talks are on even if India made such a request.

LTTE's advisor and chief negotiator Anton Balasingham told on December 2 a meeting held in London to observe the Hero's Week that they were considering seriously the Norwegian proposals for the restoration of normalcy in the LTTE held areas in Vanni and the east and reiterated that that is a must for talks to begin.

Norwegian proposal involve the lifting of the government's economic blockade and the reciprocal LTTE action of the release of policemen and armed personnel it holds in its custody. The government, it is learnt, feels that the shared burden placed on the LTTE is too light and wants strengthened with a ban on LTTE's attacks on targets outside the north and east including that on political leaders and police and armed force personnel. It is believed that LTTE would decline to accede to this request as that would weaken it by confining the conflict to the north and east.

Deep Distrust

There are many more procedural and substantial matters to be sorted out by the facilitator and by the parties to the talks. The most difficult of them would be the mutual distrust between the two rivals. Wickremanayake repeatedly harked on the question of the sincerity of Pirabhaharan. In that he is only reflecting the mount of mistrust Sinhalese entertain about Pirabhakaran's intentions. *Divaina*, the hard line Sinhala daily, is questioning Pirabhaharan's sincerity almost daily. Has he given up his goal of a separate state of Tamil Eelam, it queries in its editorials and features. The powerful Buddhist clergy too questions Pirabhaharan's sincerity.

LTTE too doubts the sincerity of the Sinhala leadership, especially that of President Kumaratunga. Pirabhaharan in his Maweerar speech of November 27 and Balasingham in his London speech had voiced their misgivings. Tamil people, in general, contemplate on the history of deception perpetrated on the Tamils by the Sinhala leadership. Since the time Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam Sinhala leadership had let down the Tamils. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and Dudley Senanayake abandoned solemn pacts they signed with Federal Party leader S.J.V.Chelvanayakam yielding to Buddhist chauvinistic pressure. Pirabhaharan hinted at these historical events in his Maweerar Day speech and adverted to the harsh discriminatory measures President Kumaratunga's mother Sirimavo imposed against the Tamils - mediawise standardization for university admissions, and enactment of the 1972 constitution which enshrined the unitary character of the state and accorded foremost place to Buddhism. Balasingham referring to President Kumaratunga's acceptance of the fact that the Tamil people have grievances and her blaming foreign colonialists, rather than Sinhala racism for that adds: "She talks about solving the ethnic problem and then vows to destroy the Tamil liberation struggle. But the Tamil people began their armed struggle after the Ahimsa form of struggle was crushed by racial violence." He added: "She refers to the Tamil freedom struggle as terrorism."

Economic Embargo

This mutual distrust would make it extremely difficult to sort out the important problems of the dismantling of economic embargo and the declaration of ceasefire. Both are sensitive issues for both parties. Prime Minister Wickremanayake and Army Commander Lt. General Lionel Ballagalla have come out openly against the withdrawal of the economic embargo and the declaration of ceasefire. They argue both measures would benefit the LTTE. Wickremanayake opines that the LTTE is militarily weak and they are seeking the lifting of the economic embargo and the declaration of ceasefire to regroup, retrain and strengthen themselves for a fresh fight. He cites past experience in support of his argument. On 11 June 1990 when the LTTE resumed armed hostilities with the collapse of negotiations between the then President Premadasa's government and the LTTE, the Tigers surrounded the police stations and captured and killed over 600 policemen. On 19 April 1995, when talks with President Kumaratunga failed Tigers commenced hostilities sinking two warships anchored at Trincomalee harbour.

Tigers blame President Premadasa for the failure of the 1989-90 talks and President Kumaratunga for the col-

(Continued from page 18)

a grip on the party's organisation and many of its leading members taking advantage of the situation in which the late leader's widow finds herself. Mrs. Ferial Ashraff is unable to publicly function in office or take part in meetings of the Supreme Council or Politburo meetings of the party since she is still observing a compulsory mourning period of four months in accordance with her religious requirement.

Some members of the party sympathetic to Mrs Ferial Ashraff feel that Mr Hakeem has taken mean advantage of her absence enforced by her religious compulsions to take full control of the SLMC and become its leader. •

lapse of the 1994-95 negotiations. In both cases, they charge, the rulers were deceitful. Bakasingham charges them with duplicity.

The imprints of these two failures are going to make the task of the Norwegian facilitators thorny. Wickremanayake and Balagalle assessed their strength on the basis of the advance the armed forces made in the five limited operations, named Kinihira, during the last two months. In these five moves aimed at recapturing the 12 kilometer long Kandy Road stretching from Ariyalai to Chavakachcheri the army had captured only 2 kilometers. Defence analysts question the usefulness of this operation on the ground of cost, destruction, benefit and speed. Concentrated bombing and shelling precede each operation, armoured units move forward under artillery cover and occupy a desolate, flattened stretch of territory, usually two kilometer broad and three kilometer long. The cost is phenomenal, material and manpower loss enormous, pace sluggish. "You will have to fight for another generation to recapture the lost territory in the Jaffna province," an analyst prophesied and added the country would have been sold by then.

Balasingham scoffs at Wickremanayake's claim that the LTTE is seeking peace because it is week. "The Sri Lankan Prime Minister says that we are coming for peace talks because we are weakened," he said. "We are not weak. We are still strong. We will not shirk from fighting; that is our forte."

Analysts doubt that the LTTE has been weakened. It is keeping the 35,000-40,000 strong army under siege in the Jaffna peninsula. It is harassing three camps - Kilali, Eluthumaduwal and Nagarkovil - constantly. It could pose threat to the army at will, analysts say. It is reigning itself for other considerations, analysts aver. The daring October 23 land-sea-air attack on Trincomalee harbour had demonstrated LTTE's growing conventional fighting power. The newly formed Radha Air Defence Unit demonstrated its capability by shooting down MI 24 gunship. LTTE's Sea Tiger suicide squad blasted two ships and its Artillery Unit assembled two artillery pieces at two points and took them away before the army could reach that location.

Pirabhaharan in his Maweerar Day speech said that the Tigers were prevented from liberating the Jaffna peninsula because of the international support provided to the government. In April when Elephant Pass fell and the Tigers pushed to the gates of the Jaffna city and began shelling Palali and Kankesanthurai harbour President Kumaratunga appealed to the international community for help. And they rushed to help her with sophisticated arms and armaments. They went all out to prevent the Sri Lankan army from meeting a disaster and the repercussions that would have in the rest of the country.

The international community does not endorse the assessment of the Prime minister and the army chief that the army is strong. Their assessment is that the war is not winnable. This is the point they made to the government, including the hardline Prime Minister. Norwegian facilitator Erik Solheim made that clear to government leaders and to Pirabhaharan. He told them that there is no alternative to a political solution. He told both sides that they should talk. They should talk without laying any preconditions. Pirabhaharan understood the message. He agreed to talk with the government without laying down any conditions.

When Solheim told that to Wickremanayake he could not believe it. He told the Tamil papers that and added he had asked Solheim to talk to Pirabhaharan again and verify whether he was agreeable to talk without conditions. He said if Solheim confirms that Pirabhaharan is willing to talk to the government without conditions then it is the duty of the government to launch some confidence building measures, acceptable to the Tigers.

The measure that would be acceptable most to the Tigers was the removal of the economic blockade. Economic blockade was clamped a decade ago by the UNP government in the hope of denying to the Tigers essential goods like medicine, fuel and food. But the LTTE had beaten the blockade and had obtained all the goods its wanted. It was the common man who is affected.

Balasinghan said the lifting the economic blockade was essential. "This is a crucial step for us," he said. "We have not insisted on troop withdrawals or ceasefire as we have in the past," he pointed out. "But we insist that the severe hardships and attacks being endured by the Tamil people must cease before any meaningful talks. We can't talk with bombs falling."

He pointed out that the Sri Lankan government's economic embargo had caused immense suffering. "The blockage of food, medicine and daily necessities, the ban on fishing, cement, etc has greatly affected the people. It has been going on for ten years. The real aim of the embargo is to break the people's desire for freedom and to make them stop supporting the LTTE," Balasingham said.

Ceasefire

Similarly the LTTE is insisting on the declaration of a ceasefire. Pirabhaharan said they cannot talk while conducting a war. But a ceasefire is vigorously resisted by the army. "That would give the LTTE breathing space," Balagalle said. "Ceasefire should come into effect after an agreement is signed," he said. An LTTE spokesman said: "We are not insisting on a ceasefire. We are only saying that stoppage of fighting would help us to concentrate on talking. By suggesting a ceasefire we are only denying ourselves the chances of grabbing some of the sophisticated weapons the government had bought."

Current thinking is to work out a ceasefire halfway during the talks. "That suits us fine. We can manipulate the war to suit our bargaining position," the LTTE spokesman said.

New Constitution

With talks looming large on the horizon government's earlier promise of enactment of a new constitution embodying the devolution proposals seems to have been shelved. The government earlier wanted to enact a constitution based on a government-opposition consensus and then talk to the LTTE on that basis. Prof. Peiris told the diplomats that that position is being reviewed The Prime Minister went further and said that proceeding with the enactment of the new constitution would harm the proposed talks. The new constitution would be drafted on the basis of the agreement concluded with the LTTE.

"We would not do anything that could be interpreted as hampering the peace talks. We will not present the draft constitution in Parliament," he said.

Basis for the solution

The Prime Minister declined to answer questions concerning the basis for a solution. "That is what we are going to talk with the LTTE," he said. The basis for the solution is slowly emerging. Solheim briefed Pirabhaharan that it should be within a united Sri Lanka. And it should meet substantially the aspirations of the Tamil people. How it would be done should be left for the negotiators to evolve. British junior Foreign Minister Peter Hain who was in Colombo on November 22 suggested that a solution on the lines of the Northern Ireland formula be considered. Hain presented to Prime Minister Wickremanayake a docket on the Northern Ireland solution. The Prime Minister promised to study it. An autonomous administration to the North-east is the solution that is emerging. The actual form the solution should take would be left to the negotiators to work out.

The international community is aware that working out a solution on the lines of the North Irish accord would be not that easy. Extrermeist hardline Sinhala chuavists would oppose any enhanced powers being given to the Tamils. Solheim had had his effigy burnt for initiating the peace process. Hain's effigy was torched for promoting Irish type of autonomy to the Tamil region. But US Under Secretary of State for South Asia, Karl Inderfurth, was spared that indignity. United States, Sihala Urumaya chief Tilak Karunaratne, explained that Inderfurth's exception was due to his country's training programme for the Sri Lankan soldiers.

Inderfurth was not enamoured of this honour. He informed the government and the opposition that his country backed Norwegian facilitation and the type of political solution Britain had suggested. He made inquiries to assess the extent of the opposition to Nowegian facilitation. He asked Speaker Anura Bandaranaike on whom he called on November 30. "Over 90 percent," replied Anura Bandaranaike. Then, at a tea party US ambassador Ashley Wills organised he probed about the extent of the Sinhala resistance to a political solution. JVP and Sihala Urumaya are known opponents. "What is the position of the Prime Minister?" Inderfurth queried. The question was passed on to Fisheries Minister Rajapakse who had just arrived. "I don't know," dotched the Fisheries Minister. TULF general secretary R. Sampanthan interjected: "There are many like the Prime Minister." According LTTE's Balasingham, the very structure of the Sri Lankan government would hamper the peaceful resolution of the conflict. "The government comprises Sinhala supremacists, Buddhist nationalists and Tamil traitors. How can such a government give justice to the Tamil people? Sinhala Buddhist supremacy was responsible for the protracted ethnic war.... The Maha Sanga opposes any concessions towards Tamil aspirations. Don't give anything to the Tamils, they say."

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Bindunuwewa Massacre - Call For Commission of Inquiry

Several leading academics, professionals and human rights activists have called upon the Government of Sri Lanka to appoint a "commission of inquiry, with adequ-ate investigative powers and resou-rces, to fully probe into the Bindu-nuwewa massacre. The mandate of the Commission should cover the identification of all those who were responsible, directly and indirectly, for the instigation, organization and carrying out of the killing of the inmates of the rehabilitation camp."

The statement issued by the signatories on 28 November said, "The cold-blooded massacre of 26 Tamil inmates at Bindunuweva Rehabilitation camp is a major set back to Sri Lanka's human rights situation a swell as inter-ethnic relations. The tension that developed in the Nuwaraeliya in the immediate aftermath of this tragic event also indicated that concerted efforts are needed to sustain conditions for inter- ethnic peace against the backdrop of a continuing war and communalist mobilization.

"Four weeks have passed since this killing of rehabilitation inmates, who were under the charge of state. Yet, no systematic investigation into this gruesome crime appears to have been launched. While the police officers who guarded the camp have been blamed for direction of duty, the actual forces and individuals that were responsible for this massacre still remain unidentified. In order to prevent the repeat of grave political crimes of this nature, it is crucially important that those who are responsible, directly and indirectly, identified and brought to justice. Evidence emerged so far suggests that the killing of unarmed young men inside their rehabilitation camp was a pre-planned action instigated by some unknown interested parties.

"In this context, we wish to remind the government that it has a duty demanded by the humanitarian law, to identify and bring to justice those who are responsible for the killing of inmates who were under the protective custody of the state. When a similar massacre occurred in 1983 in the Welikada prison, the government of the day willfully avoided inquiry. There have not been state investigations into anti-minority ethnic violence of 1958 and 1983. Once the state became passive to its own duty in bringing perpetrators of communal political crimes to justice, the massage given was that they, the culprits, enjoyed impunity as well as tacit protection of the state. We trust that the present government terminates this unfortunate tradition.

We, therefore, urge the government to immediately appoint a commission of inquiry, with adequate investigative powers and resources, to fully probe into the Bindunuwewa massacre. The mandate of the Commission should cover the identification of all those who were responsible, directly and indirectly, for the instigation, organization and carrying out of the killing of the inmates of the rehabilitation camp."

The signatories to the statement are: Jayadeva Uyangoda, Laksiri Fernando, Amal Jayawardena, M.G.A. Cooray, Tissa Abeysekere, Jayantha Senaviratne, Siri. Hettige, Stanley Kirinde, Kumari Jayawardena, Sunila Abesekera, Indrani Munasinghe, V.Nandakumar, Tissa Vitarana, Rev. Kaburugamuwe Vajira, C..S. Amaratunga, Udaya Kalupathirana, Sunanda Deshapriya, Jagath Senaratne, Sharmini Boyle, Shiral Laktilleke, Tharanga Jayawardena, K.C.J. Ratnayeke, Ranjith Perera, Vidya Abhayagunawardena, Ariyaratne Ethugala, Navaratne Bandara, Mario Gomez, Ajith Jayathunga, Rohana Lakshman Piyadasa, Sumansiri Liyange, Dharini Rahasingham-Senanayake,

(Continued from page 21)

Despite the mountain of distrust and apprehensions why did both parties decided to talk? The government desperately needs foreign financial and economic assistance to sustain and manage the island's economy which has been crippled by the scale of resources it had to devote for the continuation of its war with the LTTE. The government is under pressure to engage in peace talks as a condition for financial aid.

The LTTE is also facing tremendous pressure in many countries where its functioning, funding and propaganda work have come under greater scrutiny in the recent past. Governments of these countries have also put pressure upon it to enter the negotiating process. The LTTE would have preferred any peace talks to commence following its declared aim of recapturing Jaffna.

The government and the LTTE cannot hope to dodge the talks now. The international community is tightening the peace noose.

Human Rights Watch Berates Govt and Tigers

Intensifying civil war in northeast Sri Lanka has resulted in displacing some 250,000 people during the past twelve months, bringing the estimated number of internally displaced persons islandwide to more than one million, says Human Rights Watch, a New York based international HR organisation. In its eleventh annual report, it criticises both the government forces and LTTE rebels for continuing human rights abusing in island nation with nearly eighteen million inhabitants.

"Emergency government powers, in place almost continuously since 1983 and enhanced from May to September by additional regulations, have granted broad powers to security personnel to arrest and detain suspects, restricted freedom of association, and authorised media censorship. The LTTE was implicated in a series of suicide bombings that killed and injured hundreds of civilians. It continued to recruit and deploy child

soldiers and to physically attack and intimidate critics in the Tamil community."

The report also critical of the governments way of handling the media. Human Rights Watch is highly critical of the governments decision to close Udayan and Sunday Leader newspapers. Murdering jaffna journalist Mylvaganam Nimalarajan at his home in high security zone of Jaffna, may have been linked to his reporting on vote-rigging and intimidation during the October parliamentary elections, it says.

"Due to government restrictions, Tamil civilians were often unable to reach work sites to earn a living, attend schools, or seek urgent medical care. In eastern Sri Lanka, army and police units continued to impose forced labour, demanding that civilians work without pay building sentry posts, cutting wood, and cleaning military camps. In mid-July, villagers north of Batticaloa were reportedly forced to construct a sand bulwark around an army camp; some were beaten for refusing to comply.

On October 25, a mob in Bandarawela stormed a government-run rehabilitation camp housing, among others, suspected LTTE supporters and former LTTE child soldiers, killing over twenty-five. According to initial reports, those killed ranged in age from fourteen to twenty-five. After the attack, police briefly detained more than 250 suspects from the majority Sinhalese community, while Tamil community leaders alleged police complicity.

The LTTE committed numerous and gross abuses. Bombings of public places in the north and east, and suicide bombings in Colombo on December 18, 1999, January 5, 2000, March 10, June 7, September 15, and October 19 killed more than one hundred civilians and injured many more. Beginning in April, the LTTE engaged in increasingly aggressive recruitment drives in the Vanni, including recruitment of children as young as ten years old for combat .

The LTTE imposed restrictions on civilians wishing to leave areas it controlled and forced all villagers in some areas to join its civilian defense units. LTTE attacks and intimidation against what it referred to as "quislings" within the Tamil community had a chilling effect on dissent. Particularly at risk were members of Tamil political parties holding positions in local government. Between January and May, three members of local administrative councils in Jaffna were killed by unidentified gunmen. The LTTE held a number of political prisoners and prisoners of war, but access to detainees and details of confinement were unavailable," the report also states. ●

Letter from Jaffna

My dear Periya Annah,

I was very busy these days helping my friend Ga-nesh's younger brother who is sitting his GCE Ordinary Level examination. Our boys and girls are continuing the tradition of working hard for the examinations. You will be surprised that 37 of Jaffna students secured three straight A's in the August Advanced Level examination. From last August they sit only three papers and a general knowledge paper instead of four.

Fortunately for the OL students the rumbling sounds of war had decreased in recent weeks. The army is now conducting limited operations advancing in small steps. They recaptured six square kilometers in Nunavil on December 5 thus bringing under their control 2 kilometers of Kandy road to the west of that once prosperous agricultural village. In a series of earlier operations the army inched its way towards the Kandy Road which was under Tiger control. The army is concentrating on wresting the control of the Kandy road from Chavakachcheri to Jaffna while the Tigers are focusing their attention on laying siege of Nagarkovil by interdicting the Main Supply Route (MSR). This battle of the MSR is far away.

Pirabhaharan's Maweerar Day speech is the current topic of talk. It had rekindled the hope of peace. The people here are willing to grasp any straw that seem to promote peace. They are encouraged by the uttering of Britain's Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Peter Hain, and US Assistant Secretary of State for Asia, Karl Inderfurth. The British stand that a solution similar to Good Friday Agreement which brought about an end to the fighting between the IRA and the British army in Northern Ireland could be worked out in Sri Lanka is really pleasing.

People have begun to talk again about the light at the end of the tunnel. I do not want to sound pessimistic. If peace dawns it will be wonderful. Then, we can return to our sweet home. I yearn so much to be back in our home, to be on the shore, amidst the boats and the swirling waters.

Three of our MPs were with us for five days beginning November 28. TULF parliamentarians- Anandasangari, Mawai Senathirajah and Mathimugarajah – were here to thank their voters. We must be grateful that they came at least after one and a half months after the election. Others, including the Minister for Northern Development, are yet to sight this place.

The three MPs visited every electorate and enquired from the people the problems they face At the Jaffna meeting an old man summed it succinctly: Our problem is to live. "Why are you sounding so dejected?" Anandasangari asked him.

The man's story was pathetic. He was a peasant from Palai. War had reached his door in the mid of the night. They ran away seeking safety. He clutched his infant grandson as he ran. Three days later he found that the rest of the family had perished. Now, with his grandson, he has no place to live.

With about a fourth of Jaffna peninsula's half million people displaced, resettlement and rehabilitation is the major problem. Almost the entire

people of the Thenmarachchi division had moved to Weligamam and parts of Vadamarachchii. People of eastern Vadamarachchi have moved into its populous west and northern sections. Resident of the eastern portions of the Jaffna town too had moved out.

Fishing, the livelihood of the coastal people, is restricted to a few daylight hours when the catch is poor. "We don't earn enough to make the ends meet," Philip Sebastian told his woe to the MPs who promised to take it up with the army and the President. Sebastian pretended that he was satisfied with the MP's assurance though he knew that the army is the final authority in these matters and they are not going to listen to anyone. Jaffna peninsula that supplied fish to southern Sri Lanka is now unable to meet its demand.

In agriculture, the situation is different. Cultivators produce in excess to the demand and without transport to the south they find it difficult to market their produce. "We just can't sell our produce," moaned Sellathurai who cultivates onion, chillie and bananas. With the high cost of fertilizer and insecticides and the low farm gate prices he lost heavily the last two seasons. His request was to induce the government to transport the Jaffna produce to the other parts of the country. But the problem is there is no land route by which such produce could be transported. The only means of transport is by air, but the needs of the continuing war make the transport of the Jaffna farmers' produce a very low priority.

Education, employment, health services and transport are the other major problems affecting the people in the Jaffna peninsula. School text books are not distributed in time thus placing the Jaffna students at a disadvantage. Some of the schools have been shifted to safe areas. Displaced students do not have schooling facilities. Almost all schools are short staffed. Employment is scarce and is peddled by government supporters. Hospitals are run with depleted medical staff and even vital medicines are not available. As you very well know most of the qualified doctors from Jaffna have either gone abroad to lead a better life, or have gone to Colombo to engage in private practice. Transport is scanty.

These are known problems and the MPs who were in Jaffna for a longer period to do their election campaign should have been aware of them. But they went through the motions to impress their supports that they are caring for them and the supporters dutifully went through theirs to electrify their leaders.

This type of deception was absent among the youth and students. They organized three processions to mark the Maweerar week. This they did despite the massive measures the police and the armed forces took to prevent any observance. The Kopay army commander went to the extent of ordering temple and church priests not to ring the bells during the entire week beginning November 21. Check points and mini camps mushroomed and cordon and search operations proliferated. But the youth conducted three processions, plastered the walls with Maweerar posters, lit oil lamps and rang temple bells.

The first of those processions on November 21, the first day of the Maweerar week. Parents and guardians of the boys and girds kept in custody under the Prevention of Terrorism Act took out a procession from Jaffna Prisons to Jaffna Kachchri. They walked shouting that they did not want their relatives massacred like those kept at Bindunuwewa and handed to the Jaffna Government Agent K. Shanmuganathan a memorandum which requested the government to open a High Court in Jaffna to hear the cases in respect of the detainees. They handed the GA two copies of the memorandum, one for the President and the other for the Justice Minister. A legitimate demonstration indeed and the army or the police did not venture to stop it.

The second procession, held next day, was by the Jaffna University students. Over 2000 of them walked in pouring rain from the Jaffna University campus in Tinnevely to Jaffna Kachcheri shouting slogans against the government and the EPDP. They shouted: End the State of Emergency; EPDP- Quit Tamil Eelam; Bring the killers of Nimalarajan to justice; In 1983 Welikade Massacre, in 2000 Bundunuwewa Killing; Army should not enter the university campus., etc. The procession was stopped at a sentry point near Jaffna Kachcheri but the students insisted on proceeding to their destination.

The soldiers relen-ted and permitted the processionists to proceed. They held a meeting opposite the kachcheri and burnt the effigies of President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga and EPDP leader Douglas Devananda. Then they handed to the GA a memorandum to be sent to the President.

The third was on November 24 when students of the Jaffna Technical College took out a procession to Jaffna Kachcheri demanding the release of one of their student Sri Ranganathan who was arrested by the army. The army released the student a week later.

On the Maweerar Day, November 27, the police and the forces ordered that the shops be kept open, schools function normally and buses ply their normal service. Shops were kept open, schools were in session and buses plied normally. But the shops were without customers, schools were without student and buses ran empty. Posters saluting the fallen heroes sprouted from nowhere and the army mobile unit was kept busy removing them. Temple bells tolled in some kovils. Parameswarar temple inside the Jaffna University was one of them.

With love.

Younger brother

Anthony

Why Advani & Co. Should Go

Mani Shankar Aiyar

Tomorrow, December 6, is the doleful anniversary of the most shameful event in independent India, the destruction of a place of worship by a fanatic mob of hatemongers, organized and led by the gentleman who is today the home minister of India.

This is not a political statement, it is a judicial finding. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) has kindly undertaken a very readable translation into English of the verdict delivered in Hindi by the additional sessions judge, Jagdish Prasad Srivastava, on September 9, 1997. What follows draws from that judgment (with the English corrected when the communists' grasp over the grammar of this strange tongue fails them. Given their loyalties, they would have no similar difficulty with Chinese).

Please note the date of the judgment. It was delivered when Lal Krishna Advani was not the home minister. He assumed office a few months later. The case has not moved forward a millimetre since then. Coincidence?

Technically, the case has not moved forward because some of those indicted have moved a criminal revision petition, no.255 of 1997, in the Lucknow bench of the high court, praying that "the impugned order" be set aside, and that till a decision is taken on this, the proceedings in the session court be stayed.

The list of those who have gone in appeal does not include Advani. Nor does it include two other ministers of the present government - Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharti. Technically speaking, therefore, they have accepted that the prima facie charges laid against them by the additional sessions judge (Ayodhya episode) - to give him his full title - are warranted and to be considered further in the trial court.

But, of course, they do not accept the technical point. Outside of the courts, they have proclaimed their innocence. Moreover, they have expressed their deep regret over what happened ("saddest day of my life" and so on) and distanced themselves from all the shameful happenings of that Black Sunday eight years ago. But not all their tears can wash out one word of the judicial findings against them.

The case number is sessions case no. 344/94. Among the 40 accused are the three ministers. The chargesheet filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation against them includes offences under seven different provisions of the Indian penal code. (There is a related case no. 749/96 against Mahant Avaidyanath and others, which is covered by the same judgment but does not refer to the three ministers under scrutiny in this column). It may be noted that the CBI investigation took well over a year before being brought to the court of the additional sessions judge in 1994. The court took nearly three years to arrive at its conclusions. Clearly, total judicial rectitude was maintained throughout the proceedings.

The prosecution submitted that the three ministers, along with 27 others, "committed a criminal conspiracy" through the period "October 1990 to 6 December 1992". Among other acts of desecration, said the prosecution, "it was decided to raze the Babri Masjid to the ground". "The BJP" (in concert with three other organizations - the Bajrang Dal, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Shiv Sena) "made plans to demolish the disputed structure of the Babri Masjid". Moreover, "a suicide squad of the Bajrang Dal" was "trained" to demolish the mosque "in the Chambal valley".

Next, "on 5 December 1992", said the prosecution, "a secret meeting was held at the house of Shri Vinay Katiyar" (the BJP member of parliament for the area) "which was attended by Shri Lal Krishna Advani" at which "a final decision to demolish the disputed structure was taken". The party to that "final decision" is today the Union minister of home affairs (god bless his soul — or what remains of it). It was also the prosecution's contention "that when the disputed structure was being pulled down Shri Advani asked Kalyan Singh" (the chief minister of UP) "not to tender his resignation till the disputed structure had been completely pulled down". As for the now chagrined Uma Bharti, the prosecution said she had "instigated the karsevaks" with slogans like "ek dhakka aur do, Babri Masjid thod do" and "khoon khraba hona hain, ek bar ho jane do".

Uma Bharti in court argued that "she had made no speech instigating anyone to pull down the masjid"; on the contrary, she had "asked them to climb down". On behalf of Advani and Joshi it was contended that no criminal conspiracy had been hatched, they had not made any "instigating speeches" and the report of the observer, Tej Shauker, "is silent about the accused persons, Shri L.K. Advani and Shri Murli Manohar Joshi". More important than these denials, however, was the argument made by the advocates of these two present cabinet ministers that "the present case is not a fit case to be tried by the court of sessions". It is this argument which is being used to justify their continuance in the council of ministers.

The judge, Srivastava, said, "The court has to see whether there is any evidence available on record to sustain the chargesheet and whether there is a just basis for the framing of charges. "On the basis of what the law calls the application of the judicial mind to the evidence tendered and contested before the court, the judge held that "it is clearly established that the accused person (Advani) acted in the demolition of the disputed structure".

Moreover, said the hon'ble court, "it is crystal clear" that the BJP, in cohorts with the Shiv Sena and the Bajrang Dal, "hatched a criminal conspiracy due to which the disputed structure was pulled down". Thus, "on the basis of the evidence available on challan", the court found that

"prima facie evidence under section 120-B is established" against 38 of the 40 persons accused, including our three honourable ministers (and so are they all, all honourable men - excluding, of course, Uma Bharti who is no less honourable but not a man).

The court further found that "prima facie offences" under six other sections of the IPC, read with section 149 IPC, had been made out "against accused persons Shri Lal Krishna Advani" (the first named) and, inter alia, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharti. The court also found "on the basis of evidence produced by the prosecution" that the three ministers, in addition to several others, had also committed "a prima facie offence under section 120-B" read with five other sections of the IPC. Therefore, concluded the hon'ble judge, "they are charged under the aforesaid offences" and "directed to be presented in the court for the framing of charges".

The high court has reserved its orders on whether the case is to go forward in the sessions court. Therefore, as of now, the charges as laid by the additional sessions judge stand. In exactly the same circumstances, Harin Pathak, the BJP's former minister of state for defence production, has resigned or been made to resign. The BJP insisted on the resignation of Rameshwar Thakur, the former Congress minister of state for revenue, when the joint parliamentary committee on the securities scandal made a passing reference to a minor indiscretion on his part. Parliament was held up for 13 consecutive days. Now, when the boot is on the other foot, it seems not to pinch the BJP and its NDA allies.

Parliamentary decorum, the principle of responsibility and accountability to Parliament, and the independence of our investigating agencies, government prosecutors and the judiciary, all demand that the three ministers step aside and present themselves for trial. If they are found innocent, we can look forward to seeing them back on the front rows of the treasury benches. And if they are found guilty, we can look forward to seeing them in jail. Satyameva jayate.

The Telegraph, 5 December 2000

Actor's Release Riddled With Mysteries

T N Gopalan

Popular Kannada actor Rajkumar was released in the second week of November after a 108-day-long ordeal in the jungles.

The governments of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have since been going through the motions of nabbing brigand Veerappan and his associates. Not many take the operations seriously though and say that it is all an eyewash to appease the middle classes and the courts.

But the question furiously debated, especially in Tamil Nadu, is not whether the governments are serious or sincere or even whether Veerappan would be apprehended, but how the crisis came to be solved in the end.

Why, for what consideration, did the brigand and his new-found Tamil nationalist associates finally choose to give in when none of their major demands were met?

Was the LTTE behind the manouevres? Why was Nakkeeran editor, R.R.Gopal sidelined in the process? At the end of the day, what did the various players stand to gain? Questions, riddles, mysteries abound as also innumerable explanations, few convincing. Some of the statements made by Rajkumar himself after his release only seemed to compound the issue further.

Rajkumar and three of his associates were abducted from their farmhouse in Doddaganjanur in Tamil Nadu on the night of July 30 by a gang led by Veerappan.. At that time he had left behind an audio-cassette denouncing Rajkumar's involvement in the anti-Tamil riots in Karnataka in December1991.

Subsequently he passed across another cassette containing his ten-point charter of demands ranging from an undertaking from Karnataka to comply with the interim award of the Cauvery tribunal to making Tamil second official language in that state.

Some of them were unrealistic or unrealisable, as the demand for higher minimum wages for the plantation labour or higher procurement price for tea leaves.

But easily the most striking was the demand for immediate withdrawal of all cases against 127 tribals prosecuted under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) in Karnataka.

While 76 of them are out on bail, the rest are still in detention in Mysore prisons, languishing there for over seven years now. Veerappan also wanted five Tamil nationalists detained under the TADA in Tamil Nadu to be released.

While the two governments were only too willing to concede those two demands, the Supreme Court came in the way.

Coming down strongly on both Tamil Nadu and Karnataka for "caving in to the demands of a bandit" and expressing concern over the "growing nexus" between the terrorists and anti-national elements - read Veerappan and company on the one hand and the LTTE on the other - the apex court struck down the decision of the two governments to withdraw the cases against the alleged accomplices of Veerappan as also the Tamil nationalists.

All the same P.Nedumaran of the Thamizhar Dhesiya Iyakkam and two civil rights activists P.Kalyani and G.Sukumaran had little difficulty in securing the release of Rajkumar. And thereby hangs a very mysterious tale.

The official emissary of the two governments, Nakkeeran Gopal had made as many as four trips by himself - only one of the hostages and an aide of the actor, Maradagi Nagappa, was set free during his mission. Even he had escaped, it is put out, and Gopal had claimed that the escape proved a terrible set-back to his efforts. It was at this stage, at the instance of the Veerappan and his Tamil nationalist comrades - belonging to the Tamil Nadu Liberation Army (TNLA) and

the Tamil Nadu Retrieval Troops (TNRT) - Nedumaran and two others were deputed for the mediatory mission.

During their very first trip, Govindaraj, a son-in-law of Rajkumar, was set free. In their next undertaking after a fortnight or so, the actor and the other remaining hostage, Nagesh, were also released.

Gopal had gone with them the first time. But he was kept out of the climax. Even as he was cooling his heels in Chennai, the other three had gone inside the forests and secured the release of Rajkumar and Nagesh.

It proved a huge embarrassment for the publicity-hungry Gopal. The man who had been strutting around as if he had the sole authority over Veerappan and was surely making a lot of money too in the process was left sucking his thumb at the end of it all. He got his deserts perhaps.

The Tamil nationalists were very angry with Gopal for his cashing in on Veerappan and hence their invitation to Nedumaran and company.

But what raised many an eyebrows was the involvement of yet another trio - Kolathur Mani, a known LTTE-conduit, Dr.Bhanumathi, a Bangalore-based doctor-turned-quarry-operator and A.P.Shanmugasundaram, president of the Karnataka Tamils' Federation, another LTTE supporter.

Mani had been interrogated in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case and detained under the National Security Act (NSA) for nearly a year. He was let off the hook by the Special Investigation Team - reportedly in exchange for some valuable leads he supplied - but the Jain Commission had cast strong doubts on his dubious role.

Subsequently too when there was a mass escape of LTTE-sympathisers from the Vellore Special Camp, some of them were staying in the groves owned by Mani when the police closed in on them. He has been quite brazen about his LTTE connections. It is inconceivable that such a person would involve himself in anything which does not promote an LTTE agenda. The LTTE lobby now seeks to put it out that Mani had been campaigning on behalf of the victims of the Special Task Force set up to nab Veerappan. But such claims have few takers.

While Shanmugasundram too is known as another staunch LTTE supporter, it is Bhanu alias Bhanumathi who is providing a lot of grist to the rumourmills. Originally hailing from Tamil Nadu, she claims to have acquired a medical degree, only to give up her practice for reasons not very clear and get into quarrying.

In his first news conference at Bangalore after his release, Rajkumar had said that Bhanu who had come into the forests to check his health condition advised him to feign illness in order to make his captors nervous and force the pace of his release. He played along, and soon thereafter he was released, the actor had said. He also called her Dr Bhanu "Mahasakthi" and introduced her proudly to the mediapersons. He seemed to imply that Nedumaran was himself a party to such a drama.

Predictably this created a lot of ruckus. Nedumaran angrily denied the reports, and the next day he produced a statement from Rajkumar denying that he had ever said such a thing. Bhanu promptly went underground. (Incidentally Rajkumar also admitted that he had been very honourably treated while in captivity.)

Then the Karnataka granite lobby connection came into the open. Some family members of Dr.Bhanu were quoted as saying that only because her granite business in Krishnagiri near the Karnataka border had suffered greatly, she readily agreed to visit the actor in the forests at a time when his health was causing some concern.

Another to go with the emissaries was R.Ramkumar, Bhanu's business partner and a son of a retired Director General of Police of Karnataka. According to Bhanu, Nedumaran was a family friend of the retired DGP Ramalingam and that it was at his instance she decided to join the team. "He wanted a Bangalore-based doctor to check Rajkumar's health and convince Veerappan of the urgent need to release the actor," Bhanu had said in an interview.

However, according to some it was the other LTTE-conduit Kolathur Mani who had sought the help of Shanmugasundaram to rope in the services of Bhanu.

Everyone of those good samaritans from Bangalore has some kind of a granite business connection besides being sympathetic to the LTTE cause. A.P. Shanmugasundaram is a big-time lorry operator and Bhanu hires lorries from him regularly.

A final piece in the jigsaw puzzle is the information that Dr Bhanu had actually scouted around for a house to serve as a safe hide-out for an LTTE-man in Bangalore after the Rajiv assassination. Incidentally she has been charged by the Bangalore police with cheating an Italian businessman to the tune of several lakhs of rupees.

That apart quarry operators on the Tamil Nadu-Karnataka border have been paying protection money to Veerappan's gang for years now. Puneet Rajkumar, a son of the actor, is himself a quarry operator. Some even had it that only because he refused to pay up Veerappan, his father was abducted to teach him a lesson.

Yet another interesting piece of information was that the Bangalore-based team was there in the forests already, waiting for Nedumaran, the second time and that Veerappan handed over Rajkumar and Nagesh to the emissaries without any further ado. "The deal had been clinched much earlier," the source said.

The story possibly then is that a huge ransom money raised by the granite lobby - feeling the pinch after Rajkumar's abduction - plus the LTTE diktat paved the way for the release of the actor. But then what does the LTTE stand to gain is a relevant question.

Consider the following: following a severe crack-down, the Veerappan gang is reduced to a rump a few years ago, and at this juncture the TNLA and the TNRT youth join hands with the brigand, converting him to the Tamil nationalist cause in the process. As per the latest information available there are around 35 persons with Veerappan inside the forests.

There is bound to be a fillip to the Tamil nationalist movement now thanks to the Rajkumar affair. Would not the devotion of these ranks to the Tamil cause and their admiration for Prabhakaran help generate an atmosphere in which the LTTE could flourish once again in Tamil Nadu ?

Nedumaran and company strongly deny all LTTE angle, and swear that it is purely out of humanitarian considerations that they took upon the mission. But whoever could be-

(continued on next page)

SAROJA: An Emotional Thunderbolt

Reviewed by Prof. Carlo Fonseka

If you have tears prepare to shed them when you go to see Somaratne Dissanayake's film "Saroja". It is a film about an innocent, helpless, cute, seven-year-old Tamil girl called Saroja and her Tigerish battle-wounded father, who come to be befriended, willy nilly, by an innocent, helpful, cute, eight-year-old Sinhalese girl called Varuni and her father and mother.

For their trouble, Varuni and her parents come to be branded as traitors to the Sinhalese nation and are hounded and banished from the village where Varuni's father works as a school teacher. The villagers are educated enough only to believe in myths about their tribe, religion and homelands sanctioned by centuries of tradition. The story of Saroja is full of incidents that aroused in me pity and fear, especially pity and pity's natural expression, tears.

The rush of emotion I felt when watching the film surely exemplifies what Aristotle must have meant by 'catharsis'. While I watched it, the film purged me of the feelings of pity regularly aroused in me by the suffering of people entrapped in the fratricidal conflict wounding our country during the past few decades.

It did so by arousing in me feelings of pity for the suffering of the two little girls and their parents depicted in the film, and discharging those feelings upon them. At the end of the film I had the sense of having been "wrung dry". On being asked for my reactions to Saroja when I left the cinema, my response was to produce a handkerchief drenched by tears.

I am not a professional film critic and to write about my reactions to Saroja I have to have recourse to the resources of the only subject I have studied in some depth, namely, human physiology. The basic analytical tool of the science of physiology is the stimulus-response concept, and my aim here is to try and figure out in physiological terms why I responded to the film in the way I did. Therefore, those who are seeking a critical appraisal of the film in terms of cinematic art need not read this any further.

As it happens, Somaratne Dissanayake has a degree in Diagnostic Medical Radiography from the University of London. He practises radiography in Australia, the country of his adoption, until he saves enough money to practise his real vocation - film-making - in the country of his birth. Make no mistake, however. SD is not just a radiographer let loose in the world of cinema, he has a Master's Degree in film direction from the University of Sydney. He has certainly mastered the technique of conveying a message by exposing us to a carefully structured sequence of moving images. And what is the principal message of Saroja? Not that war is hell, but that the Tamil Tigers are fierce, vicious and ruthless. As if we didn't know that already! Reiterating it serves no purpose and is ultimately unfair to the Tamil people in our country. The Tamil Tigers were Tamils first and became Tigers afterwards. They were not born congenitally vicious. During the period of British rule in Sri Lanka, the Tamils may well have had good reasons to feel congenitally superior to the Sinhalese and in that sense they may even have become racist.

After all, Anagarika Dharmapala (1864 - 1933) himself relentlessly lambasted the Sinhalese for being "beef-eating, trouser-, coat-, tie-, shirt and shoe-wearing, whisky-drinking, language and custom abandoning males, and pudding-eating, straw-hat, high-heel and short-dress-wearing, "this erotic thing called novels" reading women". He characterised the Sinhalese as being lazy, time-wasting, slothful, unable to make (or conserve) money, given to pleasure and superstition, and ignorant of Buddhism. On the other hand, according to Dharmapala, every other ethnic group in the country was intelligent, committed, hard-working and true to its own customs. So who can blame the Tamils if they had felt superior to the Sinhalese? And is it any wonder in the light of Anagarika Dharmapala's diagnosis, that the Tamils as a group achieved comparatively more worldly success than did the Sinhalese ?

The long digression above was called for because the context of Saroja is the ongoing war between the predominantly Sinhalese armed forces of the country and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Let us not forget that war, as Clausewitz astutely observed, is "the continuation of politics by other means".

Being a war film, Saroja necessarily embodies a political judgement and the judgement is that the Tamil Tigers are fierce. Was it Bernard Shaw who once said that when a man kills a tiger he calls it sport; but when a tiger kills a man he calls it cruelty? However that may be, of what use is the political judgement implicit in the film that the

(Continued from page 27)

lieve that the LTTE supporters are indeed bothered about any kind of human rights violations anywhere except in the North and East of Sri Lanka?

The fact also remains that never in the past any of these emissaries, including Kolathur Mani who hails from a region frequented by Veerappan, had ever bothered to lift a finger for the STF victims.

That apart the TADA detenus and those enlarged on bail, but still made to trek to Mysore periodically as per the bail terms, continue to suffer. The Karnataka government has now constituted a special court to expedite the TADA trials. One can only keep one's fingers crossed.

The media and the middle classes now egg on the two governments to go after Veerappan and apprehend him and his friends at the earliest. Not a word of thanks to Veerappan for having been so decent towards Rajkumar and finally releasing him forestalling possible anti-Tamil riots in Karnataka. Not a word of sympathy for the TADA under-trials.

In such a topsy turvy world, is it any wonder that Nedumarans would like to pass off as great human rights champions?

Tigers are fierce and vicious and ruthless? So would some Sinhalese have been, I dare to think, if their ethnic group had been systematically humiliated, assaulted, iooted, murdered and even burnt alive in 1956, 1958, 1977, 1979, 1981 and 1983 for whatever reason.

Why are the Tigers fighting with such dogged perseverance and commitment? It must surely be because they have persuaded themselves that in order to ensure the survival of the Tamil people they must carve out a safe haven somewhere in the land of their birth where they can hide when they come under fire next time. And who is the prudent living Tamil who does not expect to be under fire anytime at the hands of Sinhalese with the mind-set of the villagers in SD's film? Varuni's family is not typical. It is truly exceptional.

And heaven knows how her father, for all his liberalism, multiculturalism and humanism, might have behaved if his very livelihood depended on the will and pleasure of those Sinhalese villagers (In the film he doesn't lose his job because of his views; he is only banished to another school). Or again, if Varuni's father had been a politician excessively greedy for power would he, for all his liberalism, multiculturalism and humanism, have prevented his bloodthirsty goons from beating the daylights out of Saroja? Indeed he may even have encouraged them to do so in pursuit of his ambition. He himself, or course, is too gentle a man to have done so with his own hands.

These are some of the issues submerged in the film and despite his professional training in the use of X-rays SD only scratches the surface of these issues. What he mainly concentrates on doing is demonizing the Tigers. A serious war film cannot ignore the politics of war because recourse to arms can be the last resort of people who feel oppressed.

If the film is politically so lame and impotent, as I have construed it to be, why did I respond to it with a rush of emotion and a flood of tears? Because SD knows film craft. Because the players he has cast for the different roles are superb. He has induced Tamils to play the Tamil roles and Sinhalese to play the Sinhalese roles. That itself will contribute significantly to communal reconciliation. The little girl Nithyavani Kandasamy who plays Saroja probably excels in sheer acting ability, the famous child star Shirley Temple of a bygone age. Through her sensitive behaviour on screen she may have done more to facilitate communal reconciliation than the calculated stump orations of assorted professional politicians. Mervin Maheshan who plays the role of Saroja's father may well have laid his life on the line for so convincingly exposing the fascist nature of current Tigerism. Pramudi Karunarathne's portrayal of Varuni provides a charming insight into the natural behaviour of humans unspoilt by avarice, rivalry, vanity and love of power.

It was of such children that Jesus said the Kingdom of God is made of. Janaka Kumbukage's playing of the key role of Varuni's father is imbued with a nobility that provides a glimpse of the finest flowering of unbetrayed, enlightened Sinhalese culture which is essentially a Buddhist culture. I fancy that he portrays on celluloid the role that Vijaya Kumaratunga played in real life, knowingly exposing himself to danger and worse. Neeta Fernando cast for the role of Varuni's mother, in yet another dazzling performance, seductively demonstrates that her heart has reasons which her reason knows nothing of. And, not least, Mahendra Perera's superlative Sirisena displays for all to see the quality of the products of our system of elementary education. They are better equipped to live in the stone age than in the 21st century. Nor is that all. Given his professional familiarity with the basics of human anatomy and physiology, SD knows that the part of the human brain which mediates emotions (limbic system) is different from the part of the brain which mediates analytical thought (neocortex). For simplicity's sake let us call these two parts the emotional brain and the rational brain respectively.

The emotional brain responds far more quickly than the rational brain; it springs into action almost without considering what it is doing. Which is why we sometimes find ourselves asking about the way we have behaved in a given situation; "Why on earth did I do that?" That question is asked by the rational brain which is awakening to the stimulus after the emotional brain has responded. Thus it is clear why I responded to Saroja with tears. SD has consciously and deliberately loaded the film with stimuli which act on the emotional brain and - in the jargon of physiology - my emotional brain responded by causing my lachrymal glands to secrete. Or to call a spade a spade by making me cry.

A final remark is in order. It is the duty of rulers to rule their countries during times of peace and during times of war. That is why Nero the infamous Roman Emperor has been justly censured for having fiddled while Rome was burning. But what should fiddlers who fiddle during times of peace, do during times of war? They have no choice but to continue to fiddle because that is the only thing they know to do. The most cogent justification known to me about the role of artistes during times of war was articulated by Somerset Maugham, a doctor who abandoned medicine for art. In his book called "The Summing Up" he says "... some of us are so made that there is nothing else we can do. We do not write because we want to; we write because we must... We must go on though Rome burns. Others may despise us because we do not lend a hand with a bucket of water, we can't help it; we do not know how to handle a bucket. Besides, the conflagration thrills us and charges our mind with phrases..."

The conflagration in our country has impelled Somaratne Dissanayake to make a film which is an emotional thunderbolt. Perhaps he thinks that our emotions or passions rather than our reason are the real springs of action. If so, he is in high philosophic company. It was David Hume who soberly declared: "Reason is and ought always to be the slave of the passions".

*[Up to October 2000, "Saroja" had won 7 international awards including: Dhaka International Film Festival (Bangladesh) * Audience award, * Best Asian Film(Netpac); Houston International Film Festival(USA) "Bronz award; Pyongyang International Film Festival (Korea) * Special Festival award; Singapore International Film Festival(Singapore) * Silver Screen award; Farabi International Film Festival (Isfahan-Iran) * Best Director, * Best Child performance; Chicago International Film Festival(USA) * Liv Ullman Peace award.]* •

CLASSIFIED ADS

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MATRIMONIAL

Indian Tamil Catholic parents *seek professional groom for computer engineer daughter, 24, with training in London, working in Bahrain. Send details. M 1218 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu parents *seek bride for professionally qualified son, 37, holding executive post in USA. Details and photo required. M 1219 c/o Tamil Times.*

Professional Hindu parents *seek slim, pretty, English speaking, vegetarian bride for doctor son, 35, Principal General Practitioner, Mars afflicted. Send horoscope, details. M 1220 c/o Tamil Times.*

Tamil Hindu parents *seek for British born, slim, pretty daughter, 33, Senior Fund Raising Manager, handsome groom in good employment. Send horoscope, details. M 1221 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Christian parents *seek groom for speech & hearing impaired daughter, 25, pretty and artistically influenced, qualified in India and employed in software development field in Colombo. M 1222 c/o Tamil Times.*

WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couple on their recent wedding.

Uthayakumaran *son of Mrs. M. Muthuthamby and the late Mr. S. Muthuthamby of Navaratnarajah Road, Kondavil West, Kondavil, Sri Lanka and* **Sumithira** *daughter of Mr. & Mrs. K. Thillainadesan of 83 1/3 Hampden Lane, Colombo 6, Sri Lanka on 3.12.2000 at Miami Reception Hall, Colombo 6, Sri Lanka.*

IN MEMORIAM

Seventh Death Anniversary of Mrs Gnanambikai Perumal Pillai Wife of late Dr. C. Perumal Pillai

(4th July 1924 - 12th December 1993)

Amma

Seven years have drifted by, since you were taken from our midst. Your loving care and gentle guidance still strongly missed. In your peace we find solace.

Your children, Ravi, Usha, Jeeva and Ranjit and families.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Jan 1 *Feast of Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God.*

Jan 6 *Karthigai; Vaikunda Eekathasi; South London Tamil Welfare Group (SLTWG) Drop In. Tel: 020 542 3285.*

Jan 7 *Pirathosam; Feast of Epiphany of the Lord, Jesus Christ.*

Jan 8 *Feast of Baptism of the Lord.*

Jan 9 *Full Moon; Thiruvembavai ends.*

Jan 12 *Sathurthi.*

Jan 14 *Thai Pongal.*

Jan 19 *Eekathasi.*

Jan 20 *6 p.m. Skanda Varodaya College Old Students' Association Annual General Meeting, Reunion Dinner and Variety Entertainment at Manor Park Hall, Malden Road, New Malden, Surrey KT3 6AU. For tickets and details telephone 020 8651 6129/8657 3312 – SLTWG Pongal celebrations. Tel: 020 8542 3285.*

Jan 21 *Pirathosam.*

Jan 23 *Amavasai.*

Jan 25 *Feast of the conversion of St. Paul.*

Jan 27 *SLTWG Women's Front meets. Tel: 020 8542 3285.*

Jan 28 *Sathurthi; Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas.*

Jan 30 *Shashti.*

Jan 31 *Feast of St. John Bosco.*

23rd SCOT Annual General Meeting

The Standing Committee of Tamil Speaking People held its 23rd Annual General Meeting on 28th October 2000 at The Robert Joy Centre in Putney, London SW15.

Dr. N. Poopalasingam was re-elected president for the year 2000/2001.

The following office bearers of The General Council were elected. **Vice Presidents:** *Mrs. R. Sriharan & Mr. Sri Kanthan;* **Secretary:** *Dr. S. Balakrishnan;* **Asst. Secretaries:** *Mr. Ratnajothy & Ms. D. Kumarasamy;* **Treasurer:** *Miss A. Sankaralingam;* **Asst. Treasurer:** *Miss V. Sankaralingam;* **Project Officer:** *Miss. K. Pathmaseni. Four trustees, sixteen council members and two past presidents were also elected to the General Council.*

The president in his address reiterated the commitment of SCOT to relief and rehabilitation work in the north and east of Sri Lanka. SCOT had another good year of fund raising with a total of £22,000 available for disbursement for various projects mainly for those displaced and dispossessed Tamils, whose basic needs of food, clothing and shelter have to be met.

The meeting was addressed by a guest speaker Mrs. Mary Salinsky from the UK Medical Foundation for the care of torture victims. She gave an insight of the plight of asylum seekers and torture victims in Sri Lanka. She also pointed out that the UK government does not seem to consider Tamils to be a persecuted group and that the expatriates in UK should bring pressure on the present Secretary of State to reconsider his decision.

A resolution condemning the killing of innocent civilians in the Bindunewewa detention camp was passed. It was proposed that each member of SCOT take a fact sheet regarding the incident prepared by the General Council to their respective Members of Parliament and persuade the UK government to take some active role in the resolution of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

Swaralaya 2000

Violin Vidwan, Mr. L. Kothandapani presented a programme titled 'Swaralaya 2000' in which over 60 young musicians and 20 dance students of Smt Subatra Shanteeban took part at the Beck Theatre, Hayes on 29th October. The aim of the programme according to the producer was to give confidence to the youngsters and nurture their talents. It was a delight to see the beginners play the violin, a difficult instrument, with confidence.

Sutharshan gave a remarkable solo recital on the violin accompanied by Senthuran on the mruthangam. They presented the Kapinarayani piece 'Sarasa sama thana', a Thiagaraja composition made popular by Madurai Mani Iyer, with knowledgeable confidence.

The orchestra Nadha Manjari was the main item of the evening. The melody and rhythm of the two pieces Kamaranjana and Mathyamavathy were ecstatic. The creativity of the conductor and the artistry of the pupils were excellent. Six pupils of Smt Malini Thanabalasingam gave a very impressive veena item.

The dance item, an abridged version of the production 'Brema Tharshani' by the Kingston. I. T. C. Fine Arts was presented by Smt Subatra Shanteeban. The dancing was very good but it was lacking in the original lustre due to absence of live music and props.

The producer Mr. L. Kothanapani and the children should be congratulated for their efforts and the parents can be proud of the achievements of their children.

Hindolam.

Little Whispers

Space dedicated to the Tamil youth of the new Millennium,
By Miss Jana Wimal

'I do not agree with a word you say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it'. Voltaire's succinct yet emphatic words, still bring a smile to my face, when I think of the depth and moreover the beauty to their meaning. They make the same impression on me as they did, when I first read them several years ago on the Editorial page of the Tamil Times, where they still have pride of place in every issue to date.

Yet how many of us can honestly repeat those words and mean them? And how many people do we know, that would say that to us? Perhaps however, the real issue is, how many of us are allowed to express our views, honestly and unsuppressed and without fear of judgement from, not necessarily our parents but other members of the community.

These issues could be related to life's big controversies, religion, racism, homosexuality, drugs etc. However, more commonly perhaps, how many of us can say that we share the exact same view point with our parents and other members of the older generation on for example the commonly debated question such as: 'Is it acceptable for two people to live together before or instead of marriage?' Answering yes to this question, does not mean we have the intention to do it, nor does it make us party to a scandalous way of life, it is simply a viewpoint, yet how many people simply say 'no', to avoid shocking or disappointing or being overheard and judged by 'other Tamil people'. Then there are the more personal issues behind the closed doors of many a Tamil family, the pros and cons of arranged marriage, late nights out (clubs, bars, drinking etc), talking/socialising with members of the opposite sex in public, achieving bad examination results, the pros and cons of a 'good' degree. No doubt, a lot of readers will be able to relate to some or all of the above issues.

Having spoken to many other young people on this matter, one begins to realise a trend, while so many Tamil teens believe that they have the most strict and unreasonable parents than all their peers, their parents believe that they have the most troublesome and rebellious children. This is the case from those of us studying medicine at Oxford right through the spectrum to those of us who have decided against further education and perhaps entered straight to employment or otherwise straight after school. But again this is another issue, why should our educational background dictate our place in the spectrum of Tamil youth.

Perhaps another spectrum by which the 'range' of Tamil youth could be displayed, would be how 'Tamil' each one of us is. After a [illegible]ow many of us have heard the various comments such as 'That person is so uncultured' or alternatively 'That person is so well behaved and so traditional'. Identity is a big issue of our generation. A person can at one extreme be described as traditional at the same time being old fashioned and un-cool, while at the other extreme a person battles between being an uncultured 'coconut' (brown on the outside, white on the inside!) and being modern and westernised. A century ago such confusion would never have arisen, because, to put it crudely, brown people and white people lived among their own kind. Whatever other conflicts that may have existed at the time within races themselves, or otherwise, this inner cultural identity complex wasn't a forerunner. Yet now, 100 years on, here we are. brown people living in a predominantly white land. Living, working, pro-creating and bringing up a new generation, surrounded by a foreign colour and more importantly a foreign culture, leaving this new generation with an inability to be sure exactly who to be, how to act . . . or just 'how' to 'be'. This is an inner conflict that faces much of the younger generation of the Tamil community, outside their homeland.

Homeland. Sri-Lanka. Is that really home? In that case how many of us have visited 'home' in the last 10 or 15 years. How many of us have ever been 'home' at all? How many of us consider home to be the soil we have spent most of our lives on to date? What exactly does Sri-Lanka mean to each of us?" Is it a far and distant exotic island which we can relate little to? Or conversely, is it a place one can't wait to return to? Or is it simply nothing more than the four walls of Katunayake airport, that protect us from the outside while on transit in the middle of a holiday to perhaps India. How do you feel about Sri Lanka? How do you feel about the present situation? It is not proposed to provoke a political discussion. but to provide a platform for personal views of the younger generation.

Following the opening article of Little Whispers in the September issue, we have been inundated with responses and we are very grateful to those who have taken the time to contribute. In this issue, Little Whispes is officially launched including a reprint of the opening article and a selection of the contributions. We [illegible]eesan and Jeyasangar who certainly have given our readers something to think about. We again urge anyone who wants to express an opinion, air a grievance, sing a praise or simply 'respond to a response' appearing here, please don't hesitate to put pen on paper or indeed finger to keyboard and write to us at Tamil Times Ltd. P.O.Box 121, Sutton, Surrey SM1 3TD.

Identity in Crisis.

By Sentheesan Yogarajah

Whenever I am introduced to someone, I am always asked the question 'Where do you come from?' With initial comical answers such as 'from the womb' and 'just round the corner' 1 arrive at the truth, which is that I come from Sri Lanka. More importantly that I am a Sri Lankan Tamil. Now what does this exactly mean? You see I have been living in this country for the past sixteen years, through the most influential periods for my growth. From pre-pubescence to pubescence to final adult hood. The years where the core of my character and personality have formed to make me the man I am today. Now where in my personal history does being a Sri Lankan Tamil fit in,, and how has this accident of birth helped to shape me? From the age of seven I was sent to a Tamil school and taught my language and alleged culture. But in all this schooling I am still left in doubt. How can you teach something, which by its very nature is not static but constantly evolving? Culture is something that is being created from moment to moment through the interaction of people with the society that they live in. It is only with the pleasure of hindsight can we observe culture, and when we do obscene it we must call it by its other name: Heritage.

The schools of today focus on a curriculum consisting of the language and music of our country, but what they fail to do is teach and explain the history. It is like learning to drive without knowing what a car is. By doing.this they make the subject detached from the present reality. It becomes fantastical, illusionary and frighteningly unimportant. After all who wants to learn a language that seems to have no relevance, and who wants to study a subject without understanding why? We are simply fed millions of bits of information without being told the significance of it, There is no knowledge in what we learn, and hence it is soon forgotten and eventually discarded.

There are in my opinion two things that make a person, his personal history and his racial history The former is composed of his own experiences as he has grown up in this world. This communal history is the history that comes as a right of birth. It is the heritage that is handed to him because of the race that he is born in to, in short, his ancestry. There is a sense of pride that comes from knowing what your forefathers did in carrying their glories and in accepting their mistakes. By. knowing our history', it gives us, a sense of space in this ever-growing world. It gives us a focal point from which to go forward. As Newton said 'I see further by standing on the shoulders of giants'.'

Sadly we are not taught our heritage. When questioned we are given some garbled answer about a war and the idiocy or wonderfulness of it all. We are not given facts but opinions, which can be extremely confusing, as they are never the same. I can understand that to a lot of people our history is still being fought out in Sri Lanka, it is in all aspects a relatively new one. But there are still periods before the war that can be taught such as the relevance of Ravanna in the Ramayana, or how we came to settle on such an island.

Better still why not tell us about the war? What can be so horrific? Why do we slide around the issue and make it as if we are ashamed of it? Is it because we know deep in our hearts that maybe we should have stayed and fought alongside our brothers, instead of leaving, hence opting for the comfortable life in the obscurity of some suburbia?

We are facing a crisis, not only in my generation but also in the previous generation, which brought us here. Both of us have lost our identity. For the latter it is more frightening because they have lost it through their own choice and maybe even cowardice. For my generation it was handed down to us and we had no say in it but this gives us an excuse for what will happen if the war in Sri Lanka is rectified? Do you honestly think that we will be welcomed back with open arms to the country that we abandoned years ago when it most needed its children?

At present sent what I see in my, generation is an avid acceptance of other cultures, we are looking outside our race and seeing where we can find some form of parallel. We are finding that in Indian and .Afro-Carribbean communities there are certain aspects of their heritage that we can identify with. Certainly in the Indian societies it does not truly matter what race you are as long as your religion is the same.

My generation is facing a future which holds no limits. We are creating our history every day that we live. Whether this becomes a racial history still needs to be seen. My fear is that I am living at a time w'hen my heritage is in danger of becoming extinct. Are we, through lack of education and loss of a sense of community slowly killing our race? Will we become the same as some ancient tribe that once wandered the .jungles of the Aztec? Only to be spoken about in a lecture in an obscure university course.

My friends say that these questions are irrelevant to their every day lives. They choose to ignore it, and happily carry on in vain. In many ways I can understand the reasons why they do this. Sadly our lives have become extremely hectic, so much so that there is often no time left even to think. These questions have been discarded or rather pushed to the back of a long queue. My question to my peers is what will happen when our children ask for the chronicles of our skin? Will we be able to provide an accurate answer,or will we, like our elders, merely slide around the issue?

These days we are told that through globalization the world is becoming one big community. Maybe this is where our future lies, not as a citizen of Sri Lanka or England, but as a citizen of the world.

OUT OF THE PAN INTO THE FIRE

By Jeyasangar Jeyanathan

The world that we as a community have adopted, is of no comparison to the world that wades alone in the Indian ocean some millions of un-thought miles away. However, the truth we may hide from, and the necessary appreciation we can deny. But no matter how f& away we are, a nightmare for hundreds and thousands of people, we could and perhaps should have been, unfolds its devastating never-ending story. The younger generation that swim in the cushioned glory of a money-pleasure-fun- driven world, can claim no merit for their presence and existence to this day. It is but God's Grace and mercy we all have scurried a close escape. The question I pose is, to what have we escaped to? The proverb "out of the pan and into the fire" seems to cunningly identify itself;

The views I am expressing, are in response to the thought provoking article written for the launch of the "little whispers" column by Miss J.Wimal. The world at large has a severe imbalance in wealth. - Where a Young man of my age in Sri Lanka fights for his food, here a young Tamil of similar age fights to get an upgrade on his old Nokia 3210 mobile phone. Where the same young man would be thriving to cloth himself to salvage some dignity, here his Tamil twin fights with his parents to get two Mosquino shirts instead of one, fetching beyond hundred pounds!

In this spoilt world, one could choose to be unemployed and the community will provide food, clothing a comfortable home, not to mention some spending money. This leads the further troubling question,'why should one study and go to university,' thus creating an uneducated, unemployed, and fun seeking offspring resorting an aimless lifestyle leading topremature ill-health. The fight in this world is for short cuts to more and more fun and pleasure, and our community has been forced to evolve to these different priorities presented. This world has discarded its religion, whether it be guilt and fear of God, or simply just forgetfulness. There are families here that are so nuclear, that marriages are of just 2-5 year spans. This leaving children and single-parent families, for which the government is willing to compensate for. There are some children who are in this situation. They don't know who their father is, and in a fair few cases, even the mother isn't sure who is either. Loose parenting creates a lost pleasure-seeking breed of children. The "Little Whispers" launching article brought up an issue of Tamil parenting being unnecessarily strict, thus hinting our community should resort to the modern form of loose parenting! It is

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vide parenting which offers genuine guidance and timely advice, forever. Children should respect this sincerity, and must be absolutely obedient for the successful moulding of their lives. This is all but fundamental law of nature! Our families are not plutonic like some families here which are like nuclear bombs with expiry dates perhaps of 2-3 years, usually involving casual relationships, and disastrous consequences on children that are unexpectedly and accidentally produced.

Animals in a herd casually mate, where the female members may have bared children from several members of the herd. Man too evolved from this set-up, to generate a one man, one woman relationship, bonded together in marriage producing children, living and flourishing as a single unit. Now in this western world, man is attempting to go back to its herd like nature, by having casual relationships regularly, with the production of children who are growing to do as their parents did. Is this what we as a community look to become. The verses of Sri Subramaniya Bharathi, ironically suit this plight.

பாமரராய் விலங்குகளாய்
உலகனைத்தும் இகழ்ச்சி சொலப்
பான்மை கெட்டு
நாமமது தமிழரெனக் கொண்டிங்கு
வாழ்ந்திடுதல் நன்றோ சொல்லீர!

The reason for our success and harmony is our ancient culture and tradition. Culture is the accumulated wisdom of our ancestors generated over several thousands of years. For us Tamils, we have several texts and oceans of inherited art and culture. Thirukural is one of the main texts which sets the ethics for us Tamils, and gives us a code of conduct for healthy survival. It has stood the test of time, some 2000 years. As we were forced to leave our "homeland" in such a hurry, we could not take all our precious gems of culture and tradition, and by rule of evolution, the vast treasure mine of knowledge has nearly been forgotten and hence abandoned.

This artificial, material world consumes both the western world, the creators of this monster, and its unfortunate foreign victims, including us as a community. We fled from war only to contract an infectious insidious disease that has blinded us by its tempting beauty. But like the forbidden fruit, some things should be left untouched and some rules should just be followed. We have such wise and wonderful knowledge and wisdom in our culture, we must feel proud of it, seek to study it and abide by it, not forget and oppose it, for we too will attempt to go back to our animal, herd-like level. Let us move forward as a community, not back.

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

TAMIL TIMES
Wishes all its readers and wellwishers a Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year.

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SCOT's assistance during 1999-2000, mainly to the displaced, dispossessed, orphaned and widowed population amounted to £19268. 68. The beneficiaries are listed below :

1.	**Jeeva Jothy Children's Home, Batticaloa:** *Cultural education for 80 orphans*	£ 500	
2.	**Jesuits Refugee Service, Batticaloa-Colombo:** *legal assistance to detainees and educational assistance to young detainees and children of detained parents.*	£1000	
3.	**Life Voice School For Deaf; YMCA, Batticaloa:** *Support for 22 boys and 2 girls (aged 3-14yrs)*	£ 500	
4.	**Pyantha Children's Home, Kalkudah:** *Food and water supply for 21 girls and 9 boys*	£ 500	
5.	**Rehabilitation Society For Resettlers, Mylambaveli:** *Income generation scheme for widows - Cadju nut processing*	£1000	
6.	**Social Welfare Organisation, Amparai:** *Nutrition for children in 12 pre-schools.*	£ 500	
7.	**Thirunavukarasu Nayanar Gurukullam, Thambiluvil:** *Skills training for 35 girls - Batik and Fabric printing*	£ 250	
8.	**Vipulananda Children's Home, Kathiraveli:** *Basic household goods and effects.*	£ 350	
9.	**Vipulananda Children's Home, Thiruppalugama:** *Improve sanitation and hygiene.*	£ 150	
10.	**Vipulananda Students' Orphanage, Akkaraipattu:** *Running cost of the orphanage*	£ 500	
	Total for Batticaloa Region		**£5250**
11.	**Caanan Children's Home, Irupalai:** *Running cost of the home*	£ 500	
12.	**Grace Home For Children, Cheddikulam.** *Overcome the food shortage due to embargo.*	£ 500	
13.	**Hindu Council Of Sri Lanka:** *Dry rations and basic needs for refugees in Kilinochchi and Vavuniya.*	£1000	
14.	**Jaffna Diocese Of The Church Of South India:** *Food aid, medicine and basic items for the displaced families.*	£2000	
15.	**Jaipur Foot Programme, Chundikuli:** *Artificial limbs, care and rehabilitation to land mine victims*	£1000	
16.	**Kilinochchi Assn. For The Rehabilitation Of The Disabled:** *Artificial limbs for land mine victims* **(Donation from Canada)**	£ 418.68	
17.	**Sri Durga Devi Devasthanam, Tellippallai:** *Food and care for women, children and priests*	£1000	
18.	**Sri Ramakrishna Sarada Seva Ashrama, Pt. Pedro:** *'Lakspray' milk powder and worm treatment for 2000 school children, two sewing machines for self employment for girls and the running cost of a medical clinic.*	£1500	
	Total for Jaffna Region		**£7918.68**
19.	**Hindu Samaya Abhivritti Sabha, Trincomalee:**		
	a) Books, bags and utensils for 374 students	£1500	
	b) Carpentry training in Thambiluvil & Kaluthavali	£ 500	
	c) Hand operated tricycles especially for elderly disabled	£ 750	
	(Donation of £1250 for tricycles and books etc from MIOT)		
20.	**Sri Lanka Evangelical Action Team, Trincomalee:** *Dry rations, milk powder, mats, pillows & clothing to the Madhu victims.*	£ 1500	
21.	**Trincomalee District Development Association:** *Self employment for widows-sewing, gardening & rice pounding*	£1000	
22.	**Trincomalee District Refugee Welfare Association:** *Education of 19 OL, 15 AL and 6 University students.*	£ 750	
	Total for Trincomalee Region		**£6000**
23.	**Other - Medical Foundation, London:** *Treatment, counselling and care for torture victims.*		**£ 100**

SCOT is very grateful for donations, however small they may be. Please send your donations, payable to SCOT, to 107 Coleman Court, Kimber Road, London SW18 4PB. Your donations will be duly acknowledged.

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